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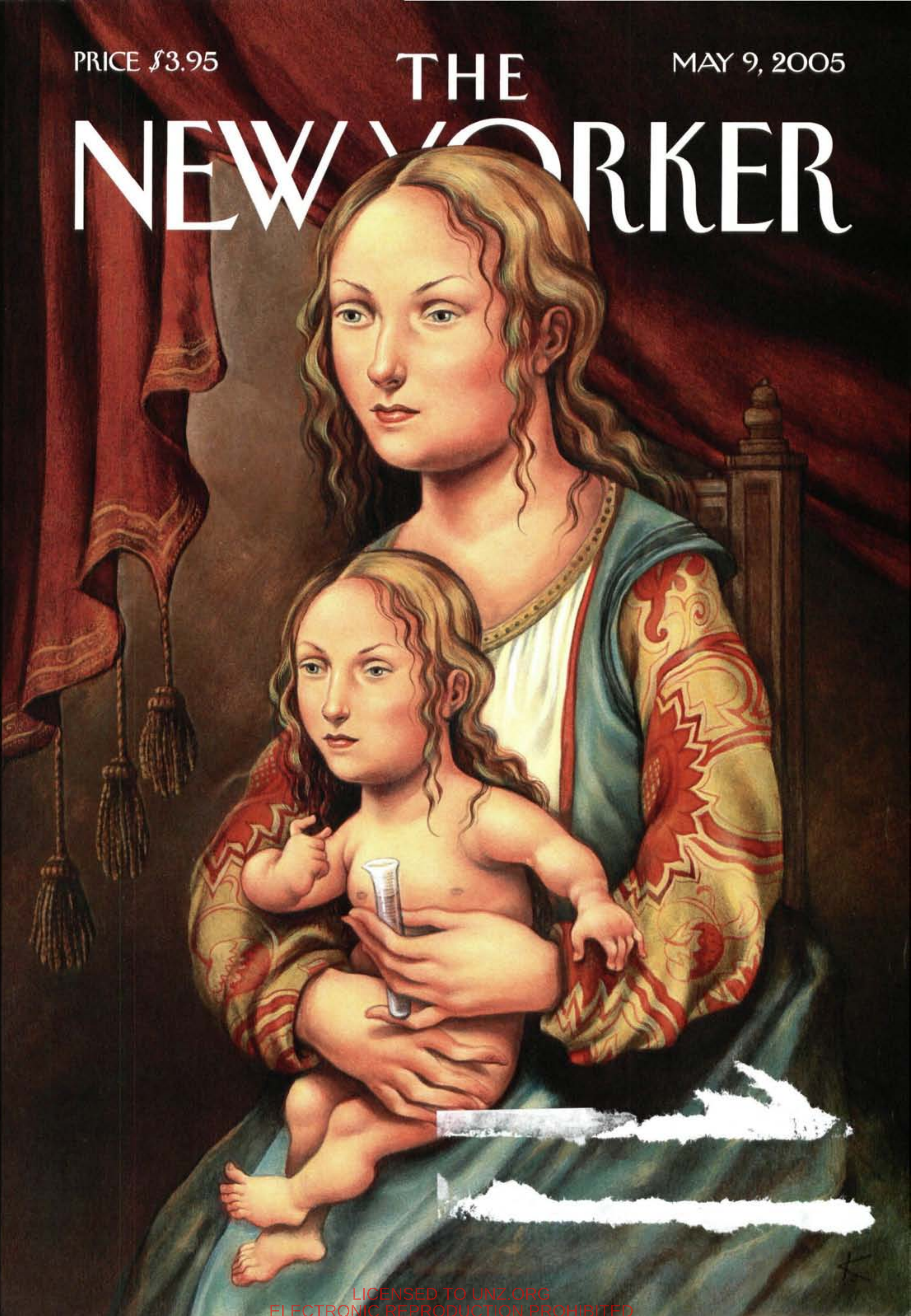

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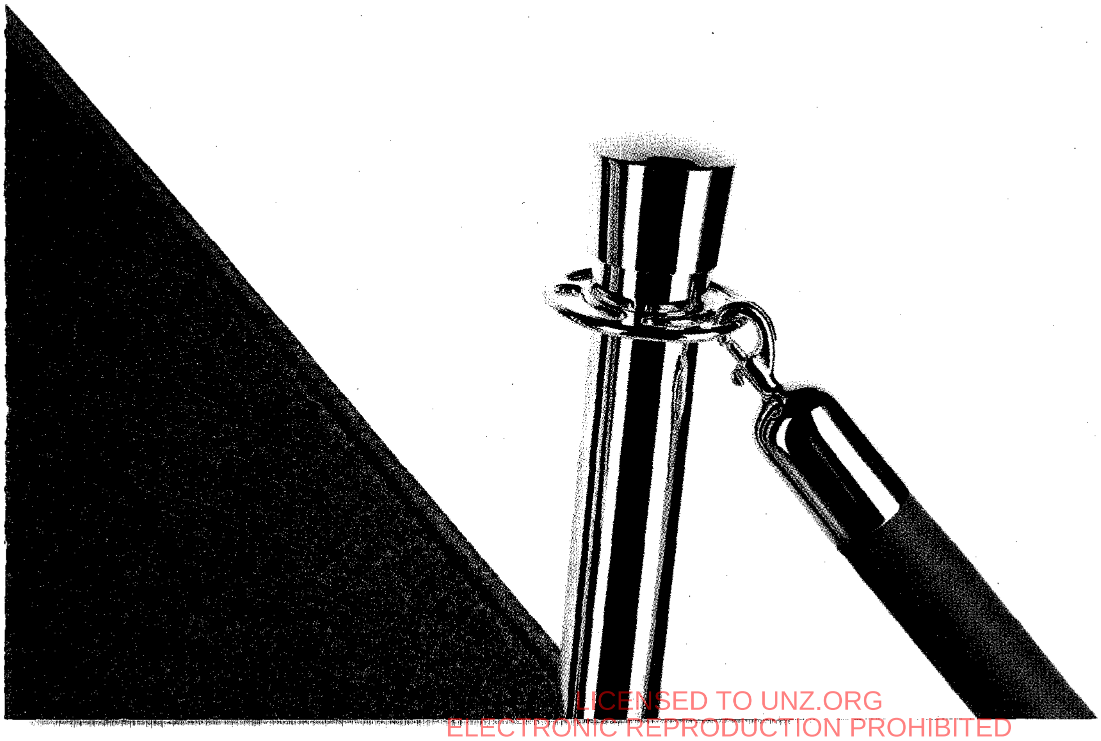

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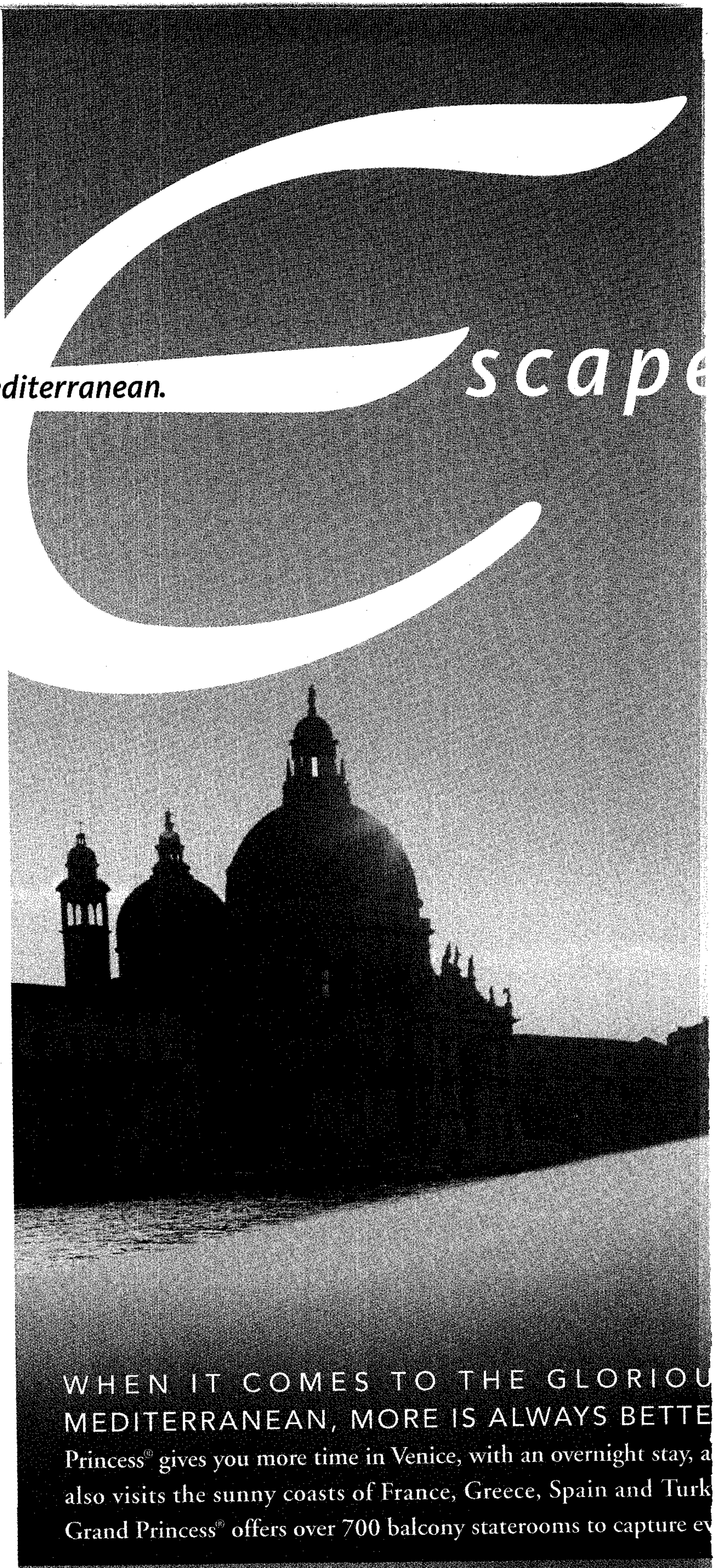

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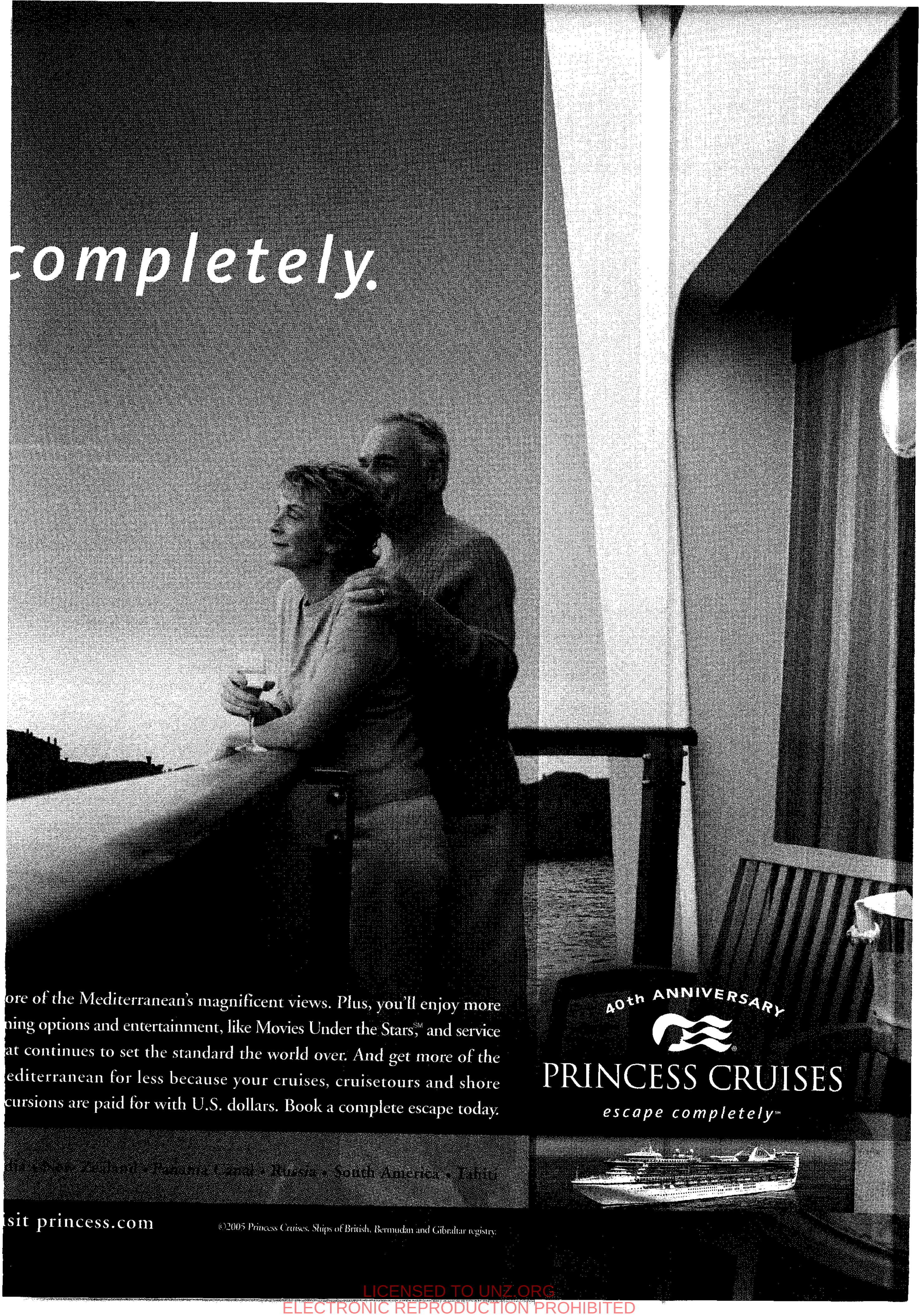

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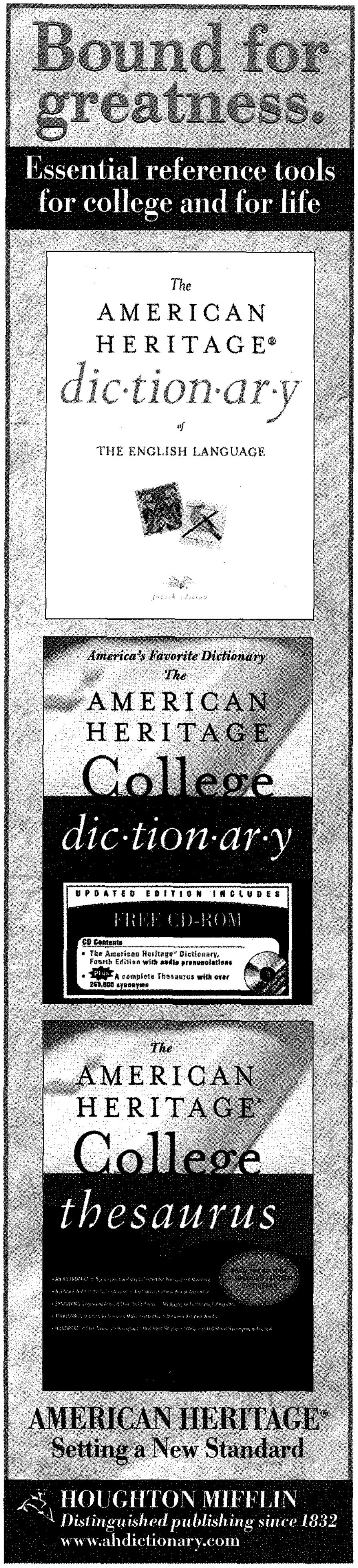
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Cynthia Zarin ("The Diarist," p. 44) has been writing for the magazine since 1983.

Katha Pollitt (Poem, p. 46) is working on a book of essays and a collection of poems. Her books include "Antarctic Traveller" and "Subject to Debate."

Anita Kunz (Cover) is showing her art work as part of a group exhibit at Storyopolis, in Los Angeles. This is her seventh cover for the magazine.

Elizabeth Kolbert ("The Climate of Man—III," p. 52) is a political correspondent for the magazine and the author of "The Prophet of Love: And Other Tales of Power and Deceit."

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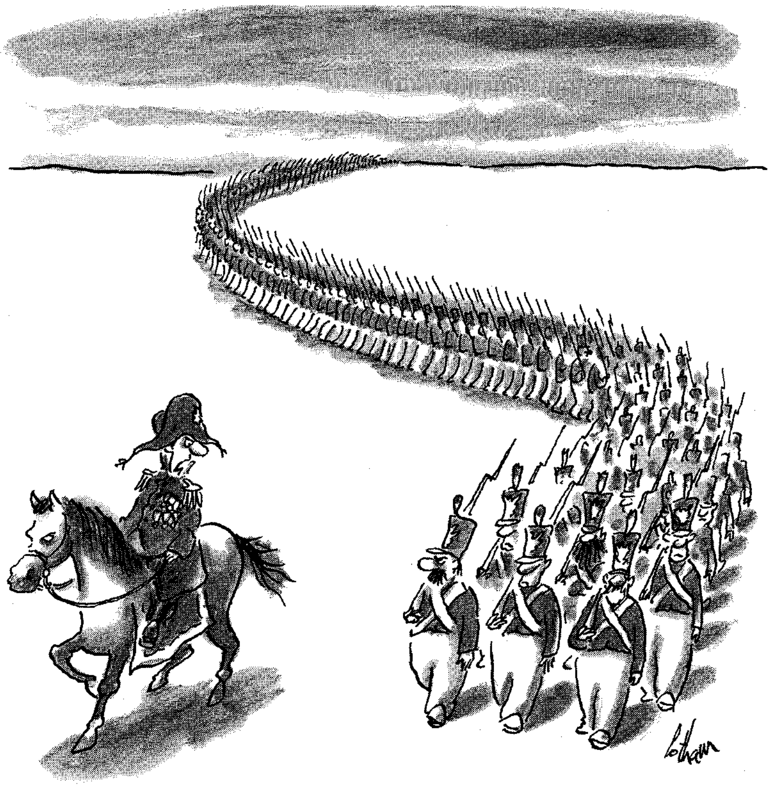
Nick Arvin (Fiction, p. 72) published his first novel, "Articles of War," in February.

Joan Acocella (The Talk of the Town, p. 34; Dancing, p. 80) writes about dance and books for the magazine.

John Updike (Books, p. 84) is a regular contributor of fiction, poetry, and criticism. His twenty-first novel, "Villages," came out last October. ♦



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COX'S CRUSADE

Jonathan Weiner gives a balanced picture of the cases for and against Paul Cox's theories about BMAA and brain disease ("The Tangle," April 11th). Still, it is worth underscoring the fact, which Weiner mentions, that although Cox is a maverick he has already made major contributions to the fields of ethnobotany and conservation. Cox co-authored the classic textbook on ethnobotany, and his work obtaining compensation for tribal healers in Samoa who shared their knowledge with AIDS researchers is considered a model around the world. Cox's critics are quite right to point out that his ideas are based on small sample sizes. However, he is using these samples to create stable hypotheses, not to draw final conclusions. His interdisciplinary approach is bound to antagonize some. Yet even if his hypotheses are wrong he will have provoked useful debate, and, if he is right, it may yield revolutionary insights for the treatment or prevention of ailments like Alzheimer's.

Mark J. Plotkin
President, Amazon Conservation Team
Arlington, Va.

The possibility, mentioned in Weiner's article, that blue-green algae produce toxins that may be implicated in the development of neurodegenerative diseases such as A.L.S., Parkinson's, and Alzheimer's should make people wary about consuming algal supplements as health foods. The blue-green algae spirulina and aphanizomenon are marketed as "superfoods," and are consumed by millions in the belief that they energize, strengthen the immune system, and ward off cancer. It would be a terrible irony if they proved to be threats to the long-term health of the brain.

Andrew Weil, M.D.
University of Arizona
Tucson, Ariz.

THE GOLDEN AGE OF ADS

Ken Auletta, in his article about Linda Kaplan Thaler and the current state of the advertising industry, is correct in observing that Thaler's Big Bang approach is under threat in a landscape where new media have lessened the dominance of traditional outlets ("The New Pitch," March 28th). Engineering a Big Bang for a product relies on making an ad that entertains while stimulating awareness. Although Thaler may be hugely successful at this, the weaknesses of the method were exposed as long ago as 1961, when Rosser Reeves published his classic book, "Reality in Advertising." He made it clear that positioning and motivation were much more important, and arrived at his famous U.S.P. formula—the Unique Selling Proposition. Ultimately, any Big Bang campaign, even one as winning as Thaler's Aflac duck, is vulnerable to a simple campaign that gives its audience a persuasive reason for the superiority of a particular product and induces people to buy it rather than a competitor's product.

Franz Brueck
Elk Grove Village, Ill.

I was pleased to see Auletta describe the 1971 McDonald's jingle, "You deserve a break today," as "a classic of manipulation," because I was the person who sang the jingle. Auletta rightly chalks up that ad's success to Keith Reinhard's copywriting talent, but credit should also go to the late composer Sidney E. Woloshin, who helped to make its music so memorable. Woloshin was one of the many gifted composers who made jingles a part of our lives. I had a thirty-year career singing amazing little songs like that one, and I think that advertising lost something when the industry started to deëmphasize creative and original music in favor of pre-recorded pop songs that bear no relation to the product.

Arlene Martell
New York City

•

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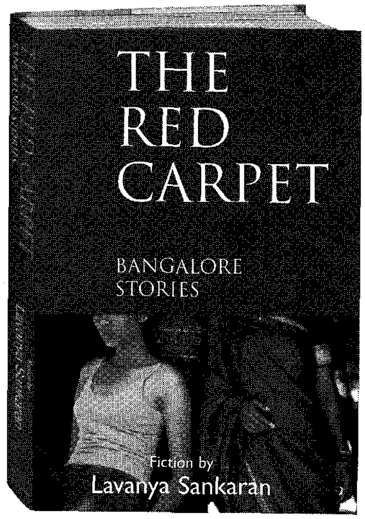

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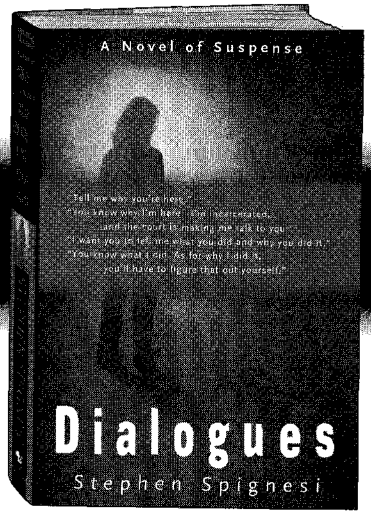
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"Tell me why you're here."
"You know why I'm here. I'm incarcerated, and the court is making me talk to you."
"I want you to tell me what you did and why you did it."
"You know what I did. As for why I did it, you'll have to figure that out yourself."
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Stephen Spignesi delivers a shocking novel about one psychiatrist's most unusual case, six unthinkable murders, and a million unanswered questions.
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"Chanel," an exhibition about the fashion designer, opens May 5 at the Met. Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
MAMET REVIVED

David Mamet's "Glengarry Glen Ross," a fast-talking look at the real-estate world that won a Pulitzer Prize in 1984, gets a Broadway revival with Alan Alda and Liev Schreiber. (See page 10.)

NIGHT LIFE
MOTÖRHEAD

Some bands are loud and fast. Others are louder and faster. Only a few, though, are louder and faster for three decades. Motörhead, led by the inimitable Lemmy Kilmister, is one of the select few; the band brings its style of punky blues-rock to the B. B. King Blues Club & Grill on May 5. (See page 12.)

ART
MAURICE SENDAK

Sendak's most famous and enduring work, "Where the Wild Things Are," furnishes the title for the Jewish Museum's retrospective of his work, but "Wild Things: The Art of Maurice Sendak" also investigates the artist's forays into opera-costume design and film animation. (See page 14.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
LEIF OVE ANDSNES

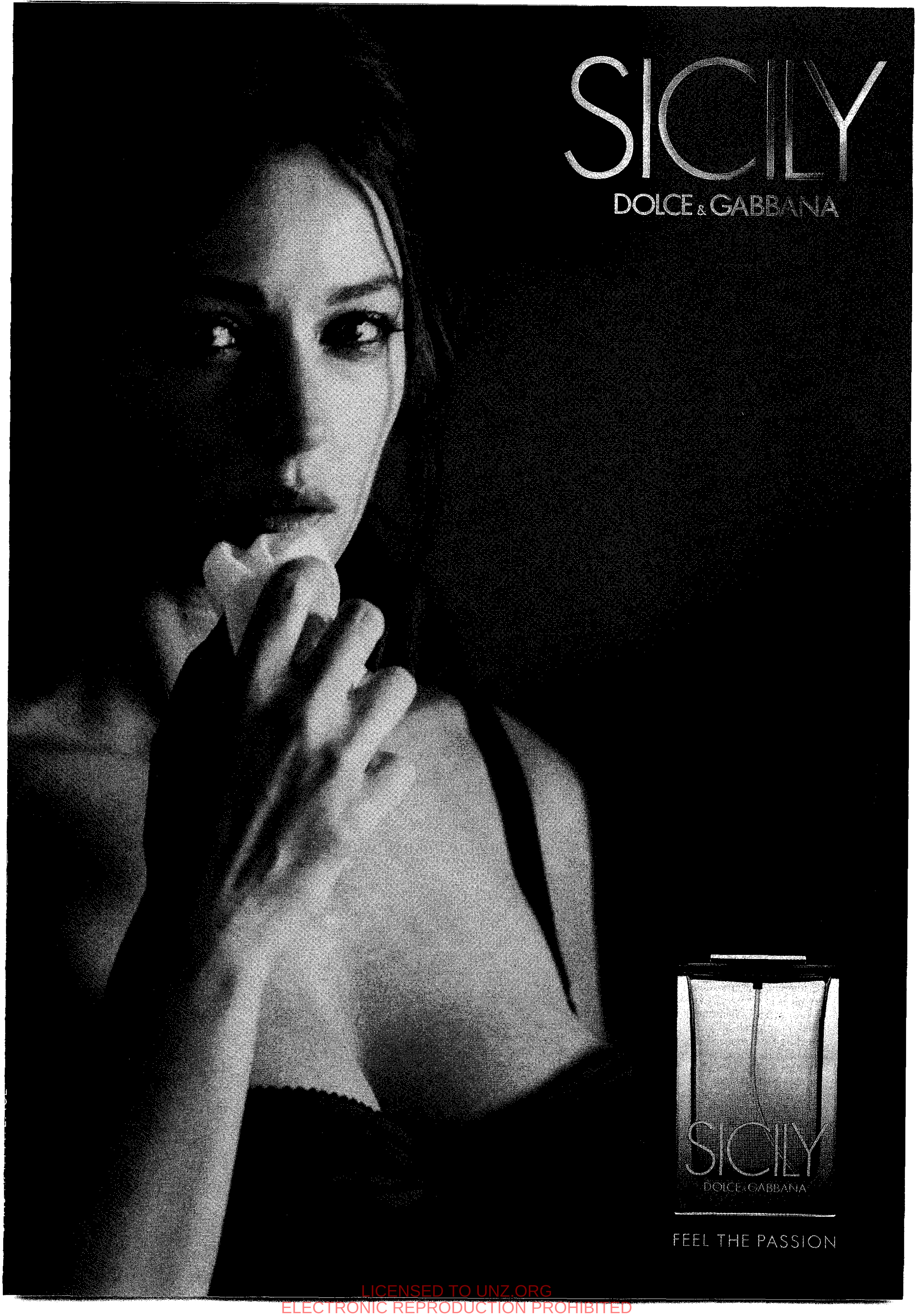
The Norwegian pianist holds court at Zankel Hall and Stern Auditorium this week. In the first of his three concerts, he serves as accompanist to the violinist Christian Tetzlaff in sonatas by Beethoven, Shostakovich, Mozart, and Grieg. (See page 19.)

MOVIES
MICHAEL POWELL

The Walter Reade Theatre presents a retrospective of Powell's films, including "The Red Shoes" and "Peeping Tom." One of the highlights of the program, which begins May 6 and runs through the end of the month, comes in the form of a talk on May 7 with Thelma Schoonmaker, who was Powell's wife but is better known as Martin Scorsese's editor. (See page 23.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND
"THE GREAT SAUNTER"

On May 7, Shorewalkers hosts its annual walk around Manhattan, a thirty-two-mile trek that includes twenty parks. (See page 24.)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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

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AFTER THE NIGHT AND THE MUSIC
A new work by Elaine May, about life in this millennium, stars Jeanne Berlin and J. Smith-Cameron. Directed by Daniel Sullivan. In previews. (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

BOOZY: THE LIFE, DEATH, AND SUBSEQUENT VILIFICATION OF LE CORBUSIER AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, ROBERT MOSES
The irony artists Les Frères Corbusier bring their century-hopping, high-concept play about urban planning to 45 Bleecker Theatre. In previews. (45 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100.)

MEMORY HOUSE
Dianne Wiest stars in a new play by Kathleen Tolan, about a woman whose college-bound adopted daughter confronts her about the ethics of international adoption. David Esbjornson directs. In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE PASSION OF THE CRAWFORD
Lypsinka (a.k.a. John Epperson) channels the screen icon Joan Crawford and interprets two of Crawford's favorite works: "Desiderata" and a text on child-rearing. May 5-14. (Zipper, 336 W. 37th St. 212-239-6200.)

SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER
Oliver Goldsmith's comedy about an arranged marriage is revived by the Irish Repertory Theatre. Directed by Charlotte Moore. Previews begin May 5. (132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

SUMMERWORKS 2005
The Clubbed Thumb theatre company presents its tenth annual festival of new plays, which begins this year with Ethan Lipton's "100 Aspects of the Moon," inspired by the woodblock prints of the Japanese artist Yoshitoshi. May 8-14. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-868-4444.)

SWEET CHARITY
A revival of the musical from 1966 about a good-natured prostitute (modelled on the heroine of Fellini's "Nights of Cabiria") stars Christina Applegate. Directed by Walter Bobbie. Opens May 4 at 6:30. (Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

NOW PLAYING

ALL WEAR BOWLERS
The physical comedians Geoff Sobelle (of Pig Iron Theatre Company) and Trey Lyford (of The Civilians) portray Buster Keaton-style clowns in this tender experiment in anachronism, in which a pair of bowler-hatted hobos stumble out of a black-and-white film and onto a stage—which alternately dismays and convulses them. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-868-4444.)

ALTAR BOYZ
In this lampoon of the boy-band phenomenon, the lyricist-songwriters Gary Adler and Michael Patrick Walker hit below the belt without being vulgar in MTV-ready songs with infectious beats and witty lyrics. The spoofy synchronized break dancing, choreographed by Christopher Gattelli, would be funny even without the merciless score. (Dodger Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

BEAST ON THE MOON
In Richard Kalinoski's play, which addresses the aftermath of the Armenian genocide, the luminous Lena Georgas plays Seta, a young survivor who is pulled from an orphanage to be the bride of another survivor, the stern Aram (Omar Metwally), and begin a new life with him in nineteen-twenties America. Although the marriage is weighted down by Aram's grief, Seta considers herself lucky to be alive. The play is compassionate and humane, if a bit sentimental, but Georgas is a delight to watch. (Century Center for the Performing Arts, 111 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

BRITS OFF BROADWAY
The series of new British theatrical imports continues. Up now: "The People Next Door," a comedy by Henry Adam, and "Sisters, Such Devoted Sisters," written and performed by Russell Barr, about a Glasgow transvestite. (59E59 Theatre, 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

CHITTY CHITTY BANG BANG
The star of this show is the car herself, who bears her human cargo out of the reach of scary villains (and over the heads of the audience) via pop-out rafts, unfurling wings, and helicopter propellers. Chitty has as many tricks up her chassis as any James Bond high-tech sports car (Bond's creator, Ian Fleming, also dreamed up this story). Yes, this is chiefly a children's show, but its quick pacing, catchy songs, and high-gloss sets (by Anthony Ward) will appeal to adults with a theatrical sweet tooth. Among the perks: standout performances by Marc Kudisch and Jan Maxwell as the lusty, child-hating Baron and Baroness Bomburst of Vulgaria; Kevin Cahoon's turn as the green-tinged, spider-legged Childcatcher; and cameos by frisky live dogs. Directed by Adrian Noble. (Hilton, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.)

DOUBT
Cherry Jones stars in John Patrick Shanley's well-told tale about possible sexual abuse in a Catholic school. Doug Hughes directs. (Reviewed in our issue of 12/13/04.) (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE FALSE SERVANT
In the Classic Stage Company's blithe revival of Marivaux's eighteenth-century comedy, with a sparkling new translation by Kathleen Tolan, Martha Plimpton gives a bravura performance as a noblewoman who dons breeches to set a trap for the scoundrel she's supposed to marry. Directed by Brian Kulick. (136 E. 13th St. 212-279-4200. Through May 7.)

GLENGARRY GLEN ROSS
Alan Alda and Liev Schreiber star in a revival of David Mamet's Pulitzer Prize-winning play. Directed by Joe Mantello. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE LIGHT IN THE PIAZZA
A last, a musical for grownups. Lovely and complicated, deeply feeling without being sentimental, Craig Lucas's book is based on Elizabeth Spencer's novella about a Southern lady who takes Clara, her beautiful but intellectually impaired daughter, to Florence, where she stumbles into a love affair. Adam Guettel's arpeggio-laden music and nuanced lyrics are superb; as John Lahr wrote in his review of the show's Chicago production last year, "Guettel's tunes are richly textured and warmly atmospheric." The show has changed since Chicago—the daughter is now played by the clear-voiced Kelli O'Hara, with just the right mix of guilelessness and passion; the part of her lover is now played by Matthew Morrison. But the powerhouse remains: Victoria Clark, playing Clara's mother, who struggles with her conscience as her daughter fights for her right to love. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT
The director Mike Nichols and his deft assembly of Merry-Andrews have stage-managed an act of grace, calling down from the heaven of their imaginations a taste of youth's eternal spring. "Spamalot" is at its most sublime when it's most infantile; it is a gambol, and no mistake. (3/28/05) (Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS
Ron Hutchinson's screwball comedy turns writer's block into slapstick. The play is spun around an actual historical moment—five days in February, 1939, when the massively over-budget production of "Gone with the Wind" went on hiatus, as the producer David O. Selznick (Douglas Sills) locked the screenwriter Ben Hecht (Matthew Arkin) and the director Victor Fleming (David Rasche) in his office and made them create a new script. In Hutchinson's depiction, this scenario resembles famous Preston Sturges meltdown scenes. (Manhattan Theatre Club, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

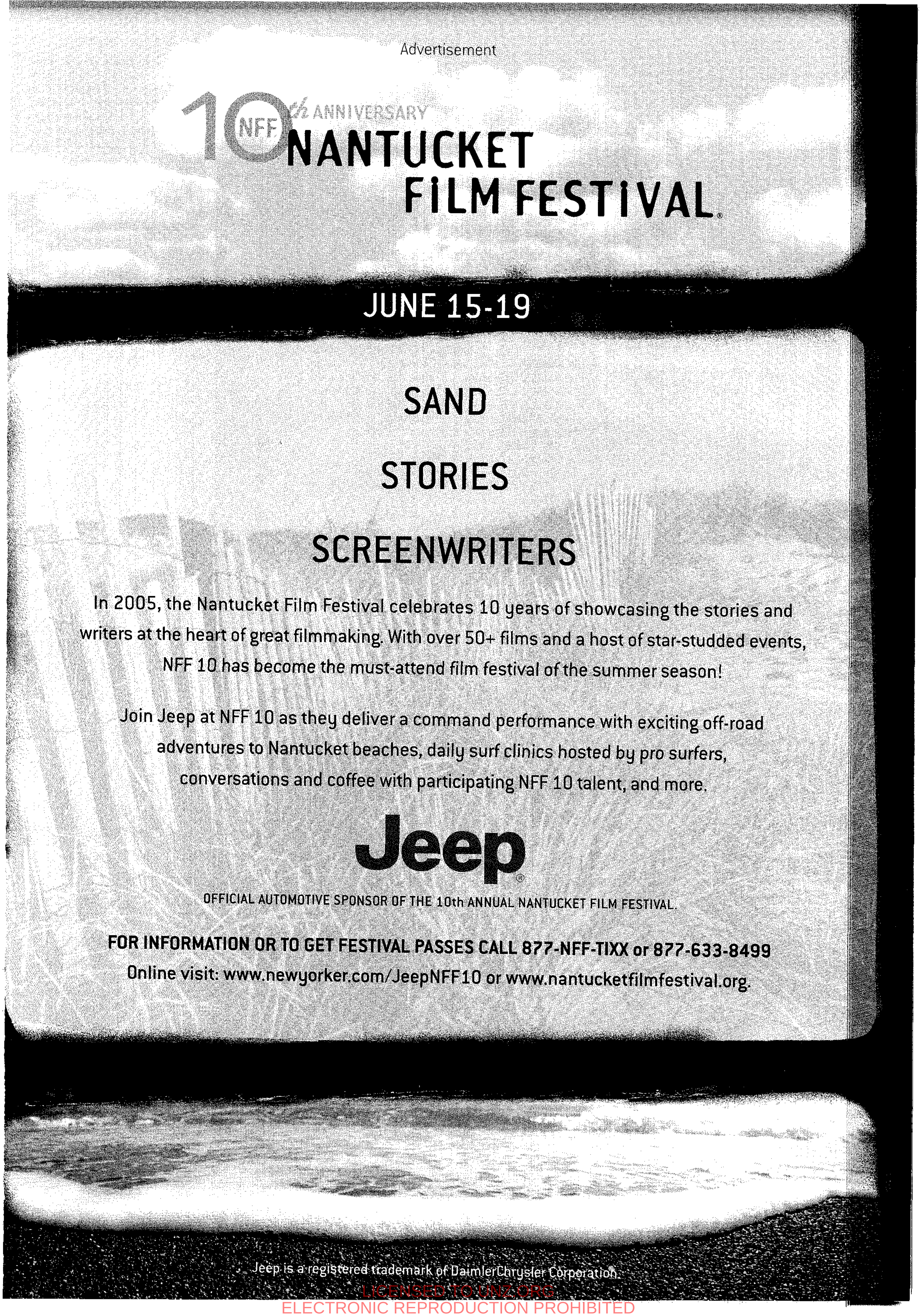
ORANGE FLOWER WATER
The writer Craig Wright, from the HBO drama "Six Feet Under," brings that program's blend of soulfulness and self-knowledge to his play about two crumbling marriages and a shaky love affair. (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave. 212-868-4444. Through May 8.)

THE PILLOWMAN
This new drama by the astonishing thirty-five-year-old playwright Martin McDonagh ("The Beauty Queen of Leenane") explores the intellectual components of narrative: what makes a story work and where the impulse to tell it comes from in the first place. As the play begins, Katurian (Billy Crudup), an author of grisly, witty children's stories, is being interrogated by two policemen: Tupolski (Jeff Goldblum) and Ariel (Zeljko Ivanek), who are short on subtlety and long on banalities. They represent the real world that Katurian, a ghastly fantasist, has never dealt with. Local children have been dying in

POP NOTES
DRABLANDS

Popular music is good at using speed, physical sensation, and unmediated language to articulate the experience of life. Short stories are good at using carefully edited prose to slowly reveal the universal truths in everyday accidents. Making the former do the latter's job sounds like a bad idea. That's because it is a bad idea, though nobody told Bruce Springsteen. For **"Devils & Dust"** (Columbia), Springsteen has once again decided to bury his skills—charisma and force of delivery—under potentially interesting details (the going price for anal sex with a stranger) and high-school-English symbols (the not-as-resonant-as-he-thinks title). It all might, possibly, add up to something if he allowed himself to rock a little, crack a joke, get angry, or name names, but Springsteen seems to be stuck in the low-temperature affect of a certain kind of American short story. As a result, "Devils & Dust" is little more than a series of well-intentioned character sketches delivered in the semi-Okie accent Springsteen created for 1982's "Nebraska" (an infinitely better iteration of the short-story-as-song idea). The musk of enforced nobleness that permeated 2002's ponderous and vague "The Rising" is all over "Devils & Dust." A song called "Silver Palomino" is about the moment when "a mother dies, leaving her young son to come to terms with the loss." We know this not because the song puts it across, but because Springsteen has included a summary in the booklet. On VH1's "Storytellers" last week, Springsteen explained his songs even further, and his appearance simply made his recent recordings more baffling. In person, he is sexy, funny, and intelligent, as wise and self-deprecatingly direct as his reputation makes him out to be. Watching him on TV, you see how Bruce Springsteen became "Bruuuuuuce!" Listening to "Devils & Dust," you can't imagine how it could have happened, or that it ever did.

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

Advertisement

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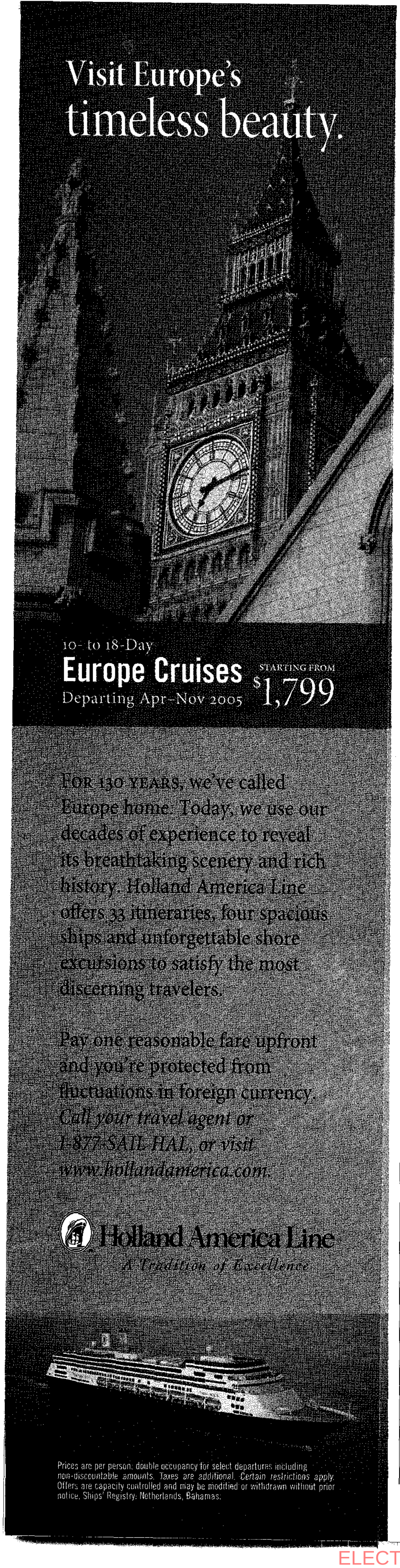

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the ways described in Katurian's tales, and the police want to uncover the facts in the case and to understand how Katurian got to be the way he is. That McDonagh is able to make this process work onstage, and that he is able to weave such large questions into a coherent dramatic frame, says a great deal about his formidable will and skill. (4/25/05) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

PRIVILEGE
A new dark comedy by Paul Weitz, about the social fallout two teen-agers suffer when their father is convicted of insider trading. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

SCORE
Leonard Bernstein's passionate relationship to music is explored in a new play conceived and directed by Anne Bogart, adapted by Jocelyn Clarke, and created by SITI Company. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

STEEL MAGNOLIAS
Jason Moore has assembled a fine cast for his revival of Robert Harling's play about sassy Southern ladies in a small-town Louisiana beauty parlor, who crack wise and share heartaches while they get their hair done. With Delta Burke as the warmhearted beautician, Truvy, Christine Ebersole as a stoic society lady, Rebecca Gayheart as her feisty daughter, and Frances Sternhagen as the winsome widow, Clairee. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE
Natasha Richardson stars in the Roundabout Theatre Company's revival of the Tennessee Williams play. Edward Hall directs. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.)

THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE
William Finn and Rachel Sheinkin's satisfying musical comedy has moved to Broadway. (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 212-239-6200.)

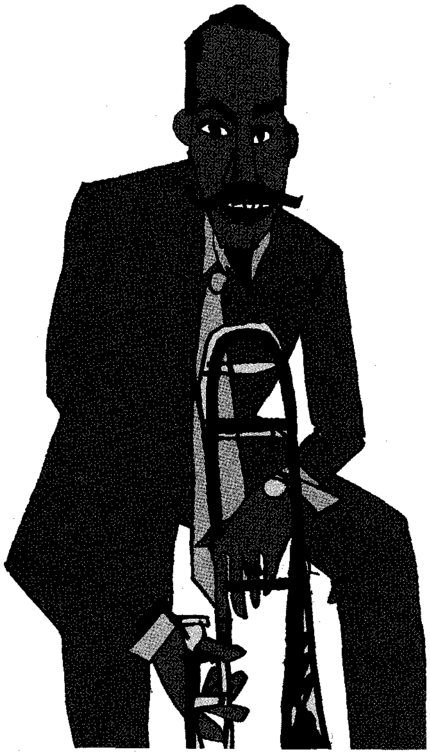
Also Playing

ABANDONMENT: Sanford Meisner Theatre, Eleventh Ave. at 22nd St. 212-868-4444. **ALL SHOOK UP:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4100. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE BEAUTY INSIDE:** The Culture Project, 45 Bleecker St. 212-868-4444. (Through May 7.) **DESSA ROSE:** Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **DIRTY ROTTEN SCOUNDRELS:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **FIDDLER ON THE ROOF:** Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4100. **THE GLASS MENAGERIE:** Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **HURLYBURLY:** 37 Arts, 450 W. 37th St. 212-307-4100. **JULIUS CAESAR:** Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **LAZER VAUDEVILLE:** John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. (Closes May 14.) **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-563-5544. **NINE PARTS OF DESIRE:** Manhattan Ensemble Theatre, 55 Mercer St. 212-239-6200. **ON GOLDEN POND:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **ORSON'S SHADOW:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **A PICASSO:** City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. **SHOCKHEADED PETER:** Little Shubert, 422 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. **SOULS OF NAPLES:** Duke on 42nd St., 229 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. (Through May 8.) **THOM PAIN (BASED ON NOTHING):** DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200. **TWELVE ANGRY MEN:** American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. **WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?:** Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **WICKED:** Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100. **WOMAN BEFORE A GLASS:** Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—May 5: Though technically **Motörhead** plays heavy metal, the British rock institution, led by the swashbuckling Lemmy Kilmister, transcends the genre. The band's bluesy rock, played with amphetamine-fuelled velocity, has made them living legends. May 6: **Delbert McClinton.** Over the course of a long, meandering career that has included teaching John Lennon a few harmonica tricks, in 1962, writing Emmylou Harris's "Two More Bottles of Wine," in 1978, and scoring his own soulful hit, "Giving It Up for Your Love," in 1980, this raucous West Texas singer has remained an uncategorizable treasure. May 10: The guitarist **Link Wray,** the father of the power chord.



Ron Westray leads a tribute to "Don Quixote," at Jazz at Lincoln Center.

JEROEN KOOLHAAS

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—May 5: When **Mike Doughty** dissolved his local alternative band Soul Coughing five years ago, he poured his energy into a solo career that placed his skewed poetic sensibility center stage. "Haughty Melodic," his latest album, however, finds him back in the company of a band. And what company it is: his collaborators on the recording include Dave Matthews and the N.E.R.D. drummer, Eric Fawcett. May 7: The producer **Prefuse 73** (a.k.a. Guillermo Scott Herren) crafts wide-ranging electronic music. His most recent work, "Surrounded by Silence," draws heavily on hip-hop sounds. The album features such artists as Ghostface Killah, Masta Killa, and GZA, from Wu-Tang Clan, and Aesop Rock. Prefuse has recorded in Georgia, where he grew up, and in Spain, but this latest musical collage—created in a studio on Prince Street—is pure New York City.

CANAL ROOM
285 West Broadway (212-941-8100)—May 5 and Thursdays this month: **Fischerspooner.** A few years ago, this art-rock duo turned a flair for theatrical productions and a taste for drum-machine beats into an enormous record contract. They had a hit with the single "Emerge" but gave the over-all impression that they had no substance. Their new record, "Odyssey," disproves that; it features contributions from the guitarist Linda Perry, the singer David Byrne, and the late critic Susan Sontag.

GLUCKSMAN IRELAND HOUSE
New York University, 1 Washington Mews (212-998-3950)—May 6: The fiddler **Kathleen Collins.**

HAMMERSTEIN BALLROOM
Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. (212-307-7171)—May 5: **New Order,** one of the longest-running and most successful bands of the post-punk movement, rose from the ashes of Joy Division following the suicide of that band's lead singer, Ian Curtis. The surviving members gave their elegiac gloom a danceable electronic beat (their song "Blue Monday" became the best-selling twelve-inch single of all time) and went on to become icons of their generation.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—May 5: The **All-American Rejects,** an irreverent bar band from Oklahoma, play sloppy rock with big pop hooks. May 8: Prepare for an evening of bittersweet nostalgia as Brooklyn's **Ambulance LTD** recalls the "shoegazer" rock of the early nineties. They're opening for the **Wonder Stuff,** which plays sharp, snappy pop tunes augmented with a punky guitar bite and the lyrical venom of the lead vocalist, Miles Hunt.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—May 5: The Brazilian guitarist, composer, and singer **Guinga** samples everything from his country's *baião* and samba to bolero and jazz. He's making his U.S. début here, performing songs from his latest album, "Noturno Copacabana," backed by the guitarist Lula Galvao, the trumpeter Jesse Sadoc, and the clarinettist Paulo Sergio. The **Mingus Orchestra** is here Thursdays, with sets at 11:30 and 1:30 A.M.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—May 4: The **Jimmy Chamberlin Complex.** The former Smashing Pumpkins and Zwan drummer indulges his taste for prog rock. May 5: The indie singer-songwriter John Darnielle gained a cult following by writing hundreds of uniquely narrative songs and recording them straight into a portable tape deck, ambient hiss and all. And while the production values on his releases have since been upped several notches, Darnielle, who records as the **Mountain Goats,** has not lost his knack for telling a story. His latest effort is "The Sunset Tree." May 7: The British rapper **Roots Manuva** (born Rodney Smith in South London) won a Music of Black Origin Award for his 1999 album, "Brand New Second Hand," and his follow-up, 2001's "Run Come Save Me," was nominated for a Mercury Prize, but it's not just the critics who have embraced him. He's here performing material from his new album, "Awfully Deep," which came out last month. With his fellow Ninja Tune artists M Sayyid and High Priest, of **Airborn Audio.**

MAKOR
35 W. 67th St. (212-601-1000)—May 5: **Spielerfrau,** the brainchild of the Soviet émigré and former television-news anchor, journalist, and singer-songwriter Michael Idov, mixes heartfelt Midwestern rock with intelligent lyrics full of Eastern European black humor and irony.

NORTHSIX
66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-599-5103)—May 6: **Prefuse 73** (see the Bowery Ballroom). May 7: The **Mountain Goats** (see the Knitting Factory).

SATALLA
37 W. 26th St. (212-576-1155)—May 6: The singer, songwriter, and slide guitarist **Patty Larkin.** With **Nadine Goellner,** a local songwriter and vocalist who artfully blends soul and jazz with her signature acoustic scatting. May 7: **Alison Brown** left a career in investment banking for a life as a banjo musician. Anyone who thinks this was a foolish move hasn't heard her play. She's here celebrating the release of her new CD, "Stolen Moments." May 8: An afternoon of zydeco music with **Lil' Anne and Hot Cayenne.**

TOWN HALL
123 W. 43rd St. (212-840-2824)—May 10: The North Carolina native **Ben Folds,** formerly of the guitarless alternative-rock trio Ben Folds Five, is back with a new band and a new album, "Songs for Silverman," which is laced with songs about fatherhood and failed relationships and includes a tribute to the late rock icon Elliott Smith.

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—May 7: The top-notch songwriting of the red-headed chanteuse **Patty Griffin.** With **Charanga Cakewalk,** a sultry electro-cumbia project led by Griffin's accordionist, Michael Ramos. May 8: The experimental duo **Autechre** churns out dense, layered textures of electronic squelches that owe little, if anything, to conventional song structure.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Through May 28: The elegant singer **Karen Akers.**

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—May 4-9: **John Pizzarelli** is an exceedingly gifted vocalist, guitarist, and bandleader who delivers standards with crackling swing.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—May 3-8: The teen-age actress **Renee Olstead** defies her peers with a passion for the Great American Songbook. She has youth and a major record company on her side.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—May 3-8: The **Marian McPartland** trio. As jazz institutions go, McPartland is pretty frisky, and her piano work is as elegant as ever. McPartland is in her eighties, but she retains the improvisational instincts of a young jazz lioness.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Through May 7: The vocalist **Keely Smith.**

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—May 4-8: The **Yellowjackets,** the grand old men of smooth jazz. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—May 5-7: In honor of the four-hundredth anniversary of Cervantes's masterpiece, "Don Quixote," the trombonist **Ron Westray,** of the **Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra,** follows in the footsteps of Richard Strauss and others in presenting his own musical impressions of the seminal novel.

LE JAZZ AU BAR
41 E. 58th St. (212-308-9455)—May 4-15: The songs of the Chicago favorite **Patricia Barber** are littered with references to David Hockney, Baudelaire, and classical mythology. It's a good thing she also swings.

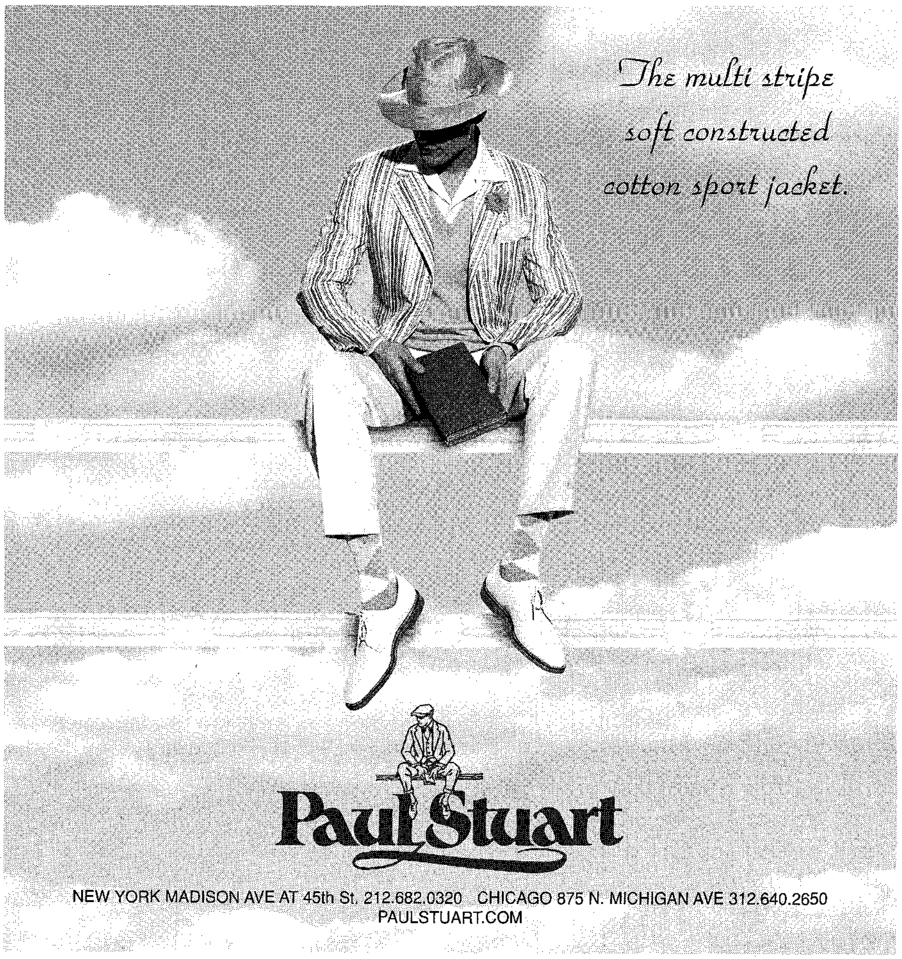
JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—May 3-5: The saxophonist **Chris Potter** spends the first half of the week with a lean trio. The end of his run, though, is more interesting. May 6-8 features his newly formed tentet, in which Potter's capable writing will set off the soloists.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—May 3-8: The pianist and composer **Uri Caine,** an exemplar of the new plurality and rampant eclecticism of the current scene. In the past he has reconfigured Mahler and Bach, and he's blown the dust off of turn-of-the-(last)-century street songs. As befits this venerable venue, Caine goes conventional here with a solid trio that includes **James Genus** on bass (with **Kenny Davis** filling in on May 7) and **Ben Perowsky** on drums. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—**"Chanel,"** a retrospective of work by the designer known as Coco (1883-1971) and others, like Karl Lagerfeld, who have carried on the legacy of her house. Opens May 5. ♦ **"John Townsend: Newport Cabinetmaker"** will


The multi stripe
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cotton sport jacket.
Paul Stuart
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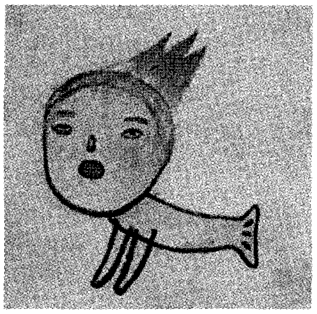
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
TOKYO POP

"I can't follow it," said a young man contemplating an anime video—the Japanese battleship Yamato, sunk in 1945, is resurrected for a mission against an alien threat—in "Little Boy," a big, bright, promotional show at the Japan Society, curated by Takashi Murakami. A young woman replied gently, "You're not supposed to follow it. You're supposed to like it." Indeed, recent Japanese pop artistry, advancing the traditions of Godzilla and Hello Kitty with ever gaudier monsters and wider-eyed tykes, contrives total gratification of tastes for apocalyptic violence and extreme cuteness—the marks of a present generation of *otaku* (nerds, geeks) in Japan. If you don't thrill to fantasies of mass destruction and never find yourself smiling back at a happy face, your feelings may go unemployed. The painting and sculpture differ from commercial products mainly in piling on sexual kinks: sadomasochism, fetishism, pedophilia. Evocation of the Hiroshima bomb, Little Boy, as the historical ur-cause suggests a certain pathology: rapturous defeatism, perhaps, that justifies youths who don't grow up.



TAKASHI MURAKAMI

—*Peter Schjeldahl*

present forty-five pieces by one of Colonial America's more prominent furniture-makers alongside additional work by his contemporaries. Opens May 6. ♦ **"Sol LeWitt on the Roof: Splotches, Whirls, and Twirls."** A summer installation in the roof garden of five sculptures and a wall drawing. Through Oct. 30. ♦ **"Max Ernst: A Retrospective."** Some hundred and eighty paintings, drawings, sculptures, collages, and illustrated books by the restlessly creative artist (1891-1976). Through July 10. ♦ **"Diane Arbus: Revelations,"** an indeed revealing (though gratingly worshipful) retrospective, confirms Arbus's achievement as a revolutionary photographer. She turned picture-making inside out. She didn't gaze at her subjects; she induced them to gaze at her. Selected for their strangeness and confidence, they burst through the camera lens with a presence so intense that whatever attitude she or you or anyone might take toward them disintegrates. Through May 15. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"The High Line"** details an ambitious urban rails-to-trails scheme for the abandoned elevated tracks that run along the West Side from Gansevoort to Thirty-fourth Street. As laid out by Field Operations and Diller Scofidio & Renfro, the plan includes a butterfly garden, a lily pond, meadows, paths, and decks for sunbathing. One of the more ingenious ideas is "peel-up seating," in which floor planks cantilever up to make benches. Also on view are other experiments in elevated architecture from around the world, and even from out of it; the show closes with Michael Kalil's gorgeous diagrams for a spherical space-station module. Through July 18. ♦ **"Thomas Demand."** The German artist's crisp photographs of cut-and-glued, life-size mockups of unpeopled environments suggest that, like photographs, our assumptions about reality are paper thin. Through May 30. ♦ **"Groundswell: Constructing the Contemporary Landscape"** surveys the newest waves in landscape design with elaborate architectural models, virtual tours, video, and photographs. Through May 16. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"The Eye of the Storm: Works in Situ by Daniel Buren"** is an "intervention"—that is, an exhibition tampering with the norms of exhibition—that fills Frank Lloyd Wright's atrium but does not improve it. An enclosed quadrant of the space, mirror clad, rises from floor to skylight. There are patches of color in the skylight (pretty) and along the ramp (boring). Passing inside the quadrant is the best part: it's darkish in there, and the hugely complex support armature feels menacing. The question of whom this arrogant show is for, and why, is more interesting than an experience that may stir nostalgia for the straightforward pomp and silliness of "The Gates." Through June 8. ♦ Rirkrit Tiravanija's **"Untitled 2005 (The Air Between the Chain-Link Fence and the Broken Bicycle Wheel)"** takes viewers' experience of television from passive to active with an engaging demonstration of how to build a low-power TV station. Through May 11. ♦ **"Recent Acquisitions: Slater Bradley's 'Doppelganger Trilogy'"** gathers three of the artist's recent videos, for which he staged utterly convincing faux performances by Kurt Cobain, Michael Jackson, and Ian Curtis. Weirdly, thrillingly, the videos can play like lost bootlegs of fallen heroes. Through May 22. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—**"Cy Twombly: Fifty Years of Works on Paper"** proves that the more works by Twombly that you see at once, the better each one gets. Fugitive spontaneities of line and texture can seem incidental, or even accidental, in isolation; in quantity, their teeming persistence gently overwhelms. Twombly's style is all nuance, inflecting desultory scribbles and scrawls. If he forces things at times—with tricky numbers and glyphs in the nineteen-sixties or, lately, with lurid color—it is to remind us of his ambition. This lyric poet aspires to the laurels of an epic bard. Through May 8. ♦ **"Tim Hawkinson,"** a mid-career retrospective of the California artist's diverse inventions, including the football-field-size "Überorgan," an automated bagpipe housed in the sculpture garden at 590 Madison Avenue, at Fifty-seventh Street. Through May 29. ♦ **"Ellen Gallagher: DeLuxe,"** a series of embellished images based on advertisements from mid-century African-American magazines. Through May 15. ♦ **"Prints Into Drawings,"** a roomful of prints made in the last fifty years assembled to illustrate the shared techniques of drawing and printmaking. Through Aug. 1. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Basquiat"** is an important, intensely enjoyable retrospective of the neo-expressionist, who died in 1988, at the age of twenty-seven. Through June 5. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

JAPAN SOCIETY
333 E. 47th St. (212-752-3015)—**"Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture."** Through July 24. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 11 to 6, Fridays 11 to 9, and weekends, 11 to 5.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—A predictably kid-friendly exhibition, **"Wild Things: The Art of Maurice Sendak"** comes complete with a shag-carpeted reading area shaded by a make-believe forest. Though Sendak is best known as the author and illustrator of the 1963 classic "Where the Wild Things Are," he has also designed costumes and sets for theatre and dance, collaborated with Tony Kushner on the opera "Brundibar," and animated films ("Really Rosie"). Illustrations for tales by the Brothers Grimm and Isaac Bashevis Singer depart from his depictions of the shaggy Wild Things (which were inspired by Sendak's Eastern European-born aunts and uncles), recalling instead quirky Old Masters like Bruegel and Bosch. The eclectic range is appropriate for an artist who declared Shakespeare, Melville, and Mozart his "chosen rabbis." Through Aug. 14. ♦ **"The Power of Conversation: Jewish Women and Their Salons."** Through July 10. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45; Thursdays, 11 to 8; and Fridays, 11 to 3.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—**"Surrealism U.S.A."** is a superb roundup of paintings and sculptures from the nineteen-thirties and forties surveying modernism's version of punk. Through May 8. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Greater New York 2005"** collects work by more than a hundred and sixty artists from around the city who have emerged in the past five years. Through Sept. 26. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

GALLERIES-UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

WAYNE THIEBAUD
There is more to Thiebaud than cakes and salami, although a familiar "Delicatessen Counter" from 1963 is included in this survey, and the sweeping landscapes he has painted in the past decade look as if they could be made of candy. Pink shadows and yellow light saturate a world that could have emerged from a child's storybook, albeit one with a cockeyed perspective. A few portraits, paintings of household items such as a tie rack or a can of paint, and some cityscapes round out the show. Through May 27. (Stone, 113 E. 90th St. 212-987-4997.)

"JUMP CUTS"
A show of contemporary art from Venezuela that moves briskly from Op-style paintings to video to surprisingly diverse sculptural objects. Alí González's beautiful "Jump Cut" (the exhibition's title refers not to this work, but to the Jean-Luc Godard technique) is a canvas-and-wood construction that hovers be-

tween painting and sculpture; Alfredo Ramírez's sculpture sends a crackling electrical current up an aluminum spine. With twenty-eight artists, the show is surprisingly large, if somewhat staid. Through May 21. (Americas Society, 680 Park Ave., at 68th St. 212-249-8950.)

Short List

ERNST LUDWIG KIRCHNER: Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623. Through May 14. **JULIAN SCHNABEL:** C&M, 45 E. 78th St. 212-861-0020. Through June 4. **PAT STEIR:** Cook, 1063 Madison Ave., at 81st St. 212-737-3550. Through May 11. **THOMAS STRUTH:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through May 7. **"CELEBRATE: 22 YEARS & A NEW HOME":** Tilton, 8 E. 76th St. 212-737-2221. Through May 12.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

DANIEL BOZHKOV
A very funny, and perhaps even profound, collection of works that incorporate practical and lascivious sources. A series of line drawings mingle imagery from Ikea furniture-assembly instructions, airline-safety manuals, and an illustrated "Kama Sutra"; assembling a bookcase or inflating a life vest starts to appear obscene, while sex starts to look like a matter of geometry. A bedroom's worth of Ikea furniture is piled together and wrapped in mosquito netting; on the bed, a television set shows the artist and a Swedish woman reciting from the Ikea catalogue, he in English, she in Swedish, their alternating voices like percussion and melody. Bozhkov is the artist who previously built a crop circle in the shape of Larry King's head and took flying lessons over it; his grand sense of the absurd is still a complete delight. Through May 14. (Kreps, 516A W. 20th St. 212-741-8849.)

JERRY DANTZIC
It would be a mistake to claim the eighty-year-old Dantzic as an important New York School rediscovery; he's no Leon Levinstein or Saul Leiter. But the best of Dantzic's black-and-white photos from the fifties are pretty terrific. Although he covers familiar ground—Times Square, Coney Island, Fifth Avenue—he always makes a human connection, whether it's with a group of bare-chested bongo players under the boardwalk or an ecstatic young woman on the merry-go-round. Through May 21. (Foley, 547 W. 27th St. 212-244-9081.)

JIM DRAIN
Just when resources seem exhausted, artists find new veins of kitsch to mine. Drain, a member of the art collective Forcefield (making his New York solo début here) references popular crafts of the nineteen-seventies: macramé, god's-eyes, handmade ponchos. The stuffed yarn-and-bead forms—in hot pinks, electric yellows, and Rastafarian medleys of red, black, and green—mimic everything from totems to dice and pillows, hookahs and bongs. As a room-size statement, it's cheery, garish, and bursting with good will. Through May 7. (Greene Naftali, 526 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770.)

ANTHONY GOICOLEA
Goicolea is no longer filling his digitally enhanced images with his own eternally adolescent clones, but his work has lost none of its ambition or mock-heroic scope. All his new photos are staged in odd settings and populated by gangs of young men who appear to be not so much outlaws (although some wear masks) as nomads. Their dwellings are caves, lean-tos, or tree houses, and though their rootlessness is part of the work's Lost Boys romance, there's also a hint of postapocalyptic survivalism here. Through May 7. (Postmasters, 459 W. 19th St. 212-727-3323.)

DAN MC CARTHY
Mythology, a sense of impending doom, and nature collide in these disconcerting beach paintings. A nuclear-hued sunset hangs ominously over a group of unclothed fishermen in an otherwise dark night; a tribe of naked beachgoers huddle in front of a bonfire trading record albums. Even seemingly mundane depictions of Southern California clichés—a bikini-clad woman carrying fish, a young couple holding hands under a white moon—ultimately become, through the artist's faint and static gray brushstrokes, not quite of this world. Through May 14. (Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663.)

GUY RICHARDS SMIT
Maxi Geil! has an exclamation point in his name and a problem with his job: he's a porn star who's developed an artist's angst about his calling. Fortunately, he finds true love—sort of—with a similarly disenchanted colleague, Giselle Thurst. Smit's hilarious and bizarre feature-length video "Nausea 2" is perhaps best described as a rococo-absurdist musical "Boogie Nights." Intentionally out-of-sync vocals, trashy sets, and a cast of art-world notables (including the artists Delia Brown, John Pilson, and Tony Matelli) showcase unforgettable lines like Maxi's impassioned indictment of his creative milieu: "You people are libertines with the souls of bureaucrats, and I'm constantly amazed by your limitations." Through May 14. (Roebling Hall, 606 W. 26th St. 212-929-8180.)

AMY WILSON
Call it the revenge of the blondes. Wilson's miniature watercolor and acrylic friezes feature armies of tiny blond figures cribbed from Henry Darger's Vivian Girls. Wilson's gals are theorist-wonks, however, ruminating in dense talk bubbles on topics like the 2004 election, Iraq, the Warren Report, and the German politician Karl Liebknecht's 1907 "Militarism and Antimilitarism." Mixing diverse visual traditions—Surrealism, comic books, and folk painting—the works look demure and pastoral from afar; up close, they pack a heavy political punch. Through May 21. (Bellwether, 134 Tenth Ave. 212-929-5959.)

"NEOCON"
A shimmering, jelly-hued abstraction by Kristin Baker imparts the only splash of color to this otherwise grimly satirical group show. Ironic portraiture (like Christoph Ruckhaberle's glum, boneless girl backed against faux-wood panelling) and tacitly anthropomorphized abstraction (like Robert Moskowitz's phallic cutout in a mist of gray stains) predominate. With Mathew Cerletty, Kevin Zucker, Jonah Koppel, Yuri Masnyj, and David Scanavino. Through May 12. (Gavin Brown at Passerby, 436 W. 15th St. 212-352-3555.)

Short List

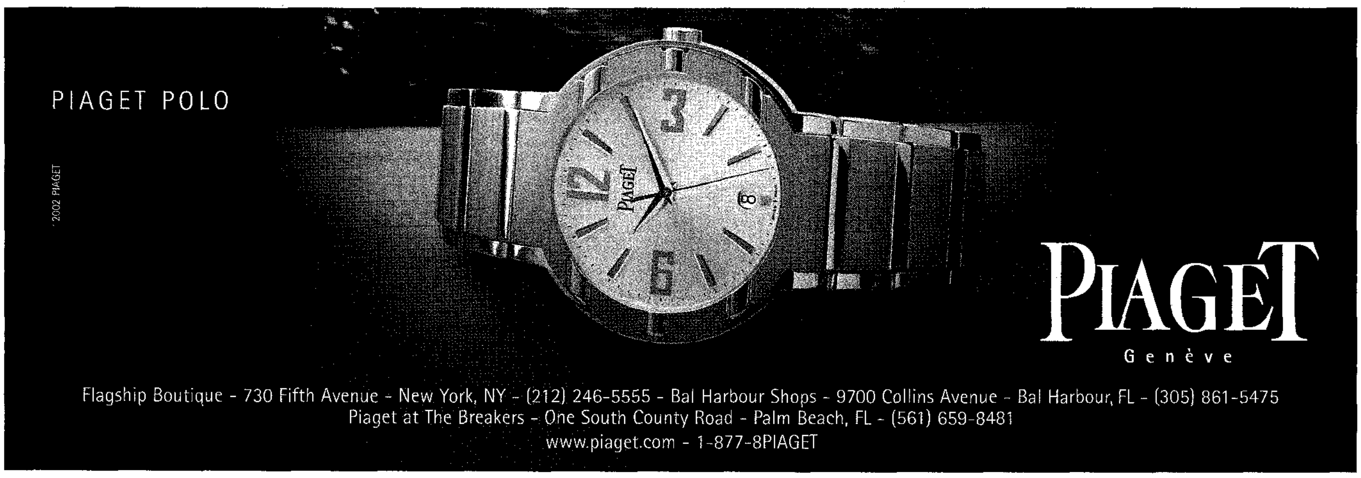
JANE HAMMOND: Lelong, 528 W. 26th St. 212-315-0470. Through May 3. **DAMIEN HIRST:** Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111. Through May 14. **PAT STEIR:** Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727. Through May 7. **JAMES WELLING:** Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through May 7.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

ALBERTO CASADO
While working as a fabricator of religious kitsch in Cuba, Casado learned a particular technique for layering crumpled, pigmented aluminum foil with pieces of glass painted in colored inks. The result looks like saturated, glittering stained glass, which Casado shapes into satirical, elegiac portraits and retablo-like scenes commenting on Cuba's past and present politics. In one image, a group of duty-free shoppers cheerfully drown themselves beneath a setting sun; in another, a radiant young Fidel is picked out in a paint-by-numbers pattern, each patch marked with one year of his ever-lengthening rule. Through June 25. (Art in General, 79 Walker St. 212-219-0473.)

EVELYN HOFER
This show of still-lifes focusses on eight classic tabletop arrangements of fruits and vegetables (one after Zurbarán) that push flawlessness dangerously close to lifelessness but pull back just in time. Photos from earlier in Hofer's peripatetic career, though no less elegant, are considerably more charming. Some of the most memorable suggest a casual intimacy with fame: Bill Brandt's tufted Victorian chair, Marianne Moore's white gloves on pale-blue tissue paper, a vase of peonies in Diego Rivera's bedroom, and Alexander Calder's homemade strainer and serving spoon—at once practical and boho chic—hanging on his wall. Through May 14. (Blum, 99 Wooster St. 212-343-0441.)

ANA PATRICIA PALACIOS
Many of these paintings and drawings focus on doubling and mirroring, with all the uneasy connotations of doppelgängers or lost identity that this might imply. Palacios's characters are described with elastic contour lines, their poses suggestive of both erotic violence and child's play. Waxy white-on-white voids are relieved only by the nervy pencil lines that cut the figures from their backgrounds and by ominous, smeary patches of red or brown. Nevertheless, a comic sweetness also comes through. Through May 14. (Latin Collector, 153 Hudson St. 212-334-7813.)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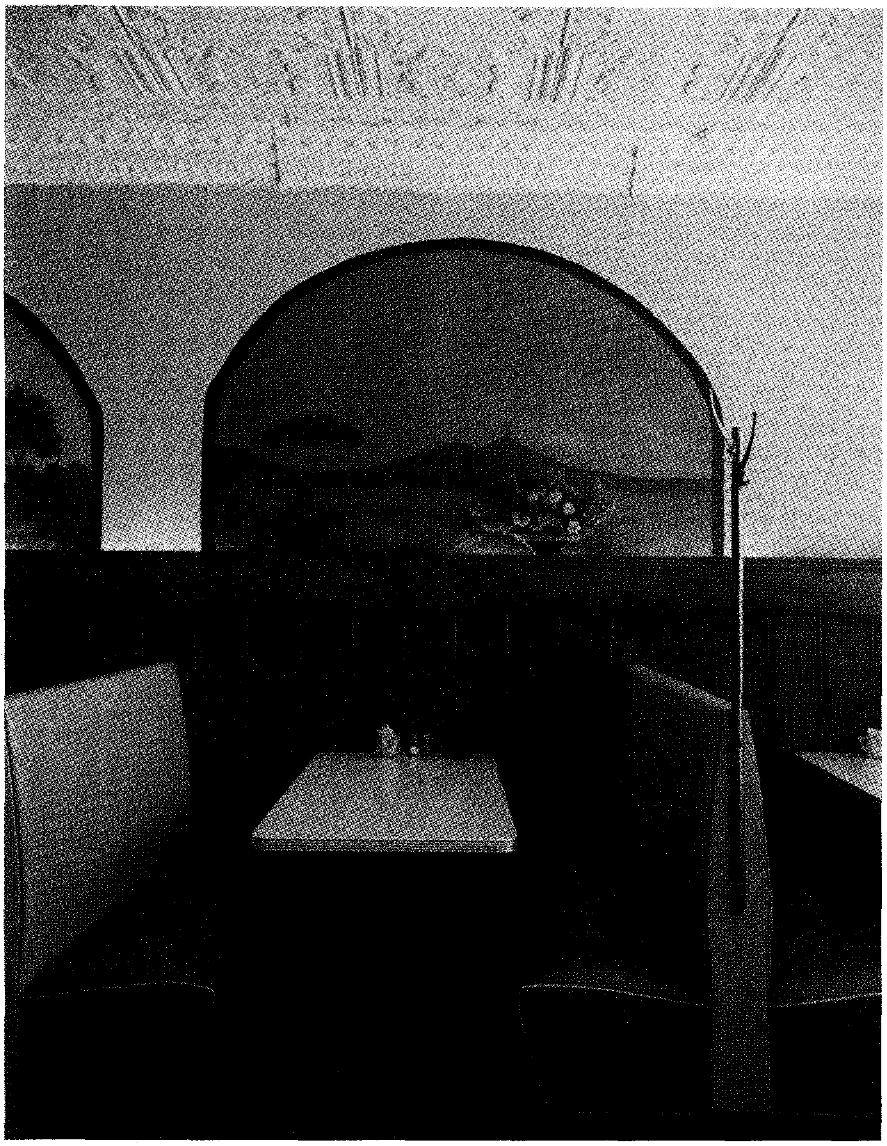

"Little Italy, Mulberry Street, 1965," by Evelyn Hofer, at Blum.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET

The spring gala ushers in a season packed with premières and fond farewells. Peter Martins's new "Tālā Gaisma" is tailor-made for the departing Jock Soto, whose expert partnering is showcased in pas de deux with three different dancers. Peter Boal, also in his final season, joins Wendy Whelan in Edwaard Liang's "Distant Cries," an inventive duet about shifting moods in a couple's relationship. Other new works include Albert Evans's pas de deux "Broken Promise," set to a score by Mathew Fuerst; Benjamin Millepied's "Double Aria," with music by Daniel Ott; and Christopher Wheeldon's "An American in Paris," with fabulous costumes, lavish sets, and more than thirty dancers. ♦ May 3 at 7:30: "Chichester Psalms," "Sonatas and Interludes," "N.Y. Export: Opus Jazz," and "Who Cares?" ♦ May 4 at 7:30 (gala): "Tālā Gaisma," "Double Aria," "Broken Promise," "Distant Cries," and "An American in Paris." ♦ May 5 at 8: "N.Y. Export: Opus Jazz," "Tālā Gaisma," and "Stars and Stripes." ♦ May 6 at 8: "Harlequinade" and "Who Cares?" ♦ May 7 at 2: "Apollo," "N.Y. Export: Opus Jazz," and "An American in Paris." ♦ May 7 at 8: "Tchaikovsky Suite No. 3" and "Union Jack." ♦ May 8 at 3: "An American in Paris" and "Harlequinade." ♦ May 10 at 7:30: "Apollo," "Tālā Gaisma," "Distant Cries," and "An American in Paris." (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Through June 26.)

"THE VIVIAN GIRLS"

The Seattle-based choreographer Pat Graney animates the heroines of Henry Darger's watercolor epic about the hermaphroditic Vivian Girls, who fight warlike invaders. Slides of the outsider artist's vivid, troubling work glow on a back wall while, in shadowy light, dancers in white party dresses hop and skip, winged fairies tiptoe on point around stacks of giant books, and ghostlike figures stand stock still in posed tableaux. The effect is part Alice in Wonderland, part Eurydice. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. May 4-7 at 7:30.)

COMPLEXIONS CONTEMPORARY BALLET

Though they range widely in age, ethnicity, and training, the dancers that Dwight Rhoden and Desmond Richardson bring together are uniformly impressive. (Richardson is in a category by himself.) The troupe's first weeklong season at the Joyce features two premières by Rhoden: "Flaw," a large-scale dance with a fervid duet for Richardson and Jodie Gates, and "Showman's Groove," a solo for Richardson set to recordings by Michael Bublé. William Forsythe's "Approximate Sonata," from 1966, and repertory by Rhoden fill out the two programs. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. May 3 at 7, May 4-6 at 8, May 7 at 2 and 8, and May 8 at 2 and 7:30.)

"MIGRATIONS"

The innovative choreographer Noémie Lafrance ("Descent," "Noir") has created a new work for the Liz Gerring Dance Company, set to an original score by Janek Schaefer. Performing in the windowed lobby of the Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria, across from Grand Central Station, dancers evoke patterns of pedestrian traffic on Forty-second Street. The dance kicks off Altria's new "Resonant Space" festival. (May 4 at 8 and 9. Doors open at 7:30. No tickets necessary.)

"FIGURES ON A FIELD"

In his disturbing new performance piece, a collaboration with the artist Laylah Ali, Dean Moss draws on Ali's cartoonlike "Greenhead" paintings. Seven black performers matter-of-factly enact enigmatic, violent scenarios—a nasty game of dodge ball, some sadomasochistic choking with a belt. Bodies pile up in a heap, seemingly wounded or lamed. A docent adds a distancing layer, guiding members of the audience through the performance as if they were on a museum tour. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. May 5-7 at 8. Through May 14.)

NINA WINTHROP AND DANCERS

Three dances derived from gestures and glances. In "I'm at Sixes and Sevens," adults mime the body language of young children. As a saxophone bleats disjointed notes, girls in flaxen dresses daydream, fidget, and tussle, suggesting the bored aggression of children who've been cooped up too long. With original music by Jon Gibson. (Flea Theatre, 41 White St., at Broadway. 212-645-6462. May 4-7 at 7:30 and May 8 at 3.)

SYMPHONY SPACE'S DANCE SAMPLER

Each spring, for one night only, uptown becomes the headquarters of downtown dance. As always, the four-hour showcase is a grab bag: you've got your Bronx-based house-and-club fusion (Arthur Aviles), your contemporary Graham (Deborah Zall), your modern Irish step dancing (Darrah Carr), your edgy-young-man group (Miguel Gutierrez and the Powerful People), your basketball-game-cum-dance-theatre piece (Peter Pucci Plus)—and eleven other acts. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. May 7 at 7.)

"JOYCE SOHO PRESENTS"

The annual showcase of work by emerging choreographers begins. First up: Kiyoko Kashiwagi's "Metamorphosis," about the life cycle of a cicada; Cid Pearlman's "Strange Toys," a suite of two-minute dances created with the cellist Joan Jeanrenaud; Daniel Linehan's solo "Digested Noise," which blends everyday movement with spoken word and sound effects; and Stefanie Batten Bland's "A Little Piece of a Part," a quintet set to a score by Cliff Martinez. (155 Mercer St. 212-334-7479. May 5-7 at 8. Through May 21.)

STREB S.L.A.M.

Elizabeth Streb's acrobatic, madly inventive troupe presents experiments in what they call "PopAction" at the Streb Lab for Action Mechanics, in Williamsburg. The highlights are: "Gauntlet 2," in which the performers dodge a swinging cement-block pendulum, and "Ricochet," in which they bounce themselves off a Plexiglas wall. (51 N. 1st St. 718-384-6491. May 6-7 at 7 and May 8 at 3.)

TAMI STRONACH DANCE

The choreographer joins Kate Weare, Monica Bill Barnes, and Lindsey Dietz Marchant in "Contain Yourself, Darling," an absurdist quartet about the elasticity of identity. The evening also includes the new ensemble piece "The Maid and the Marmalade," a fable about love, family, and power. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. May 5-8 at 8:30.)

"DANCEMOPOLITAN"

David Parker and the Bang Group host the cabaret-style dance series at Joe's Pub (in collaboration with Dancenow/NYC) and offer dance interludes in between performances by Clare Byrne, Daniel Charon, Mary Cochran, John Heginbotham, and others. (425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200. May 6-7 at 7.)

NAI-NI CHEN DANCE COMPANY

The troupe's season at John Jay Theatre includes the première of Chen's "Landscape Over Zero," inspired by a poem by Bei Dao and set to original music by Joan La Barbara. The evening also includes the piece "Unbroken Thread," in which the dancers perform on an elaborate webbed set by Myung Hee Cho. (Tenth Ave. at 59th St. 800-650-0246. May 6-7 at 8.)

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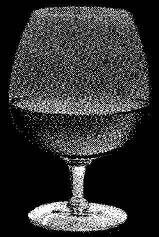

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CELEBRATES

MEXICAN ART

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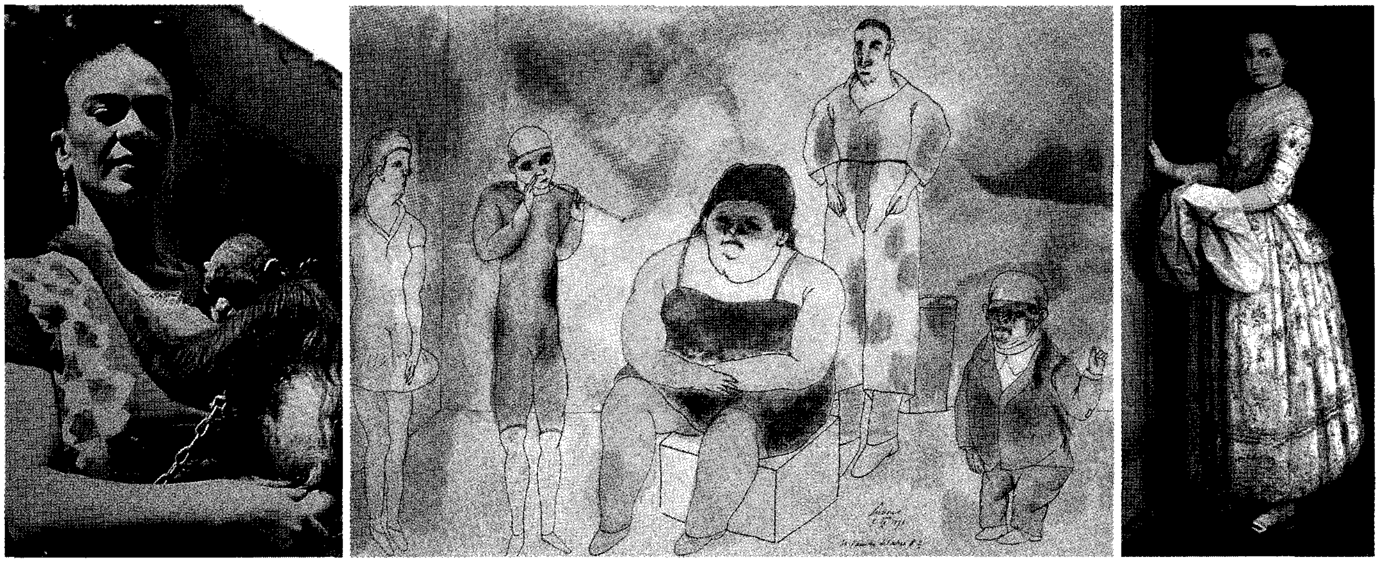


EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO
"Points of View: Photography in the Permanent Collection"
Through July 31
1230 Fifth Avenue (104th Street), New York
elmuseo.org

Displaying recent acquisitions in fine art photography by recognized Latin American masters as well as emerging contemporary artists, this exhibition also commemorates the legacy of Felipe Dante, who founded En Foco in 1974 to promote the work of Latino photographers. Among the highlights are three photographs of Frida Kahlo—one by her husband Diego Rivera, one by Fritz Henle, and another by Emmy Lou Packard. Other photographers represented include Mariana Yampolsky, Flor Garduño, Graciela Iturbide, Gabriel de la Mora, Betsabee Romero, and many others.

MEXIC-ARTE MUSEUM
"Grandeza Mexicana (The Greatness of México): 16th–19th Centuries"
Through June 26
419 Congress Avenue, Austin, Texas
mexic-artemuseum.org

Featuring remarkable artworks and historical objects, this survey of Mexican art and culture presents an overview of what poet Bernardo de Balbuena praised in his 1604 poem entitled "The Greatness of México." A collaboration with Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes and Instituto Nacional de Anthropologia e Historia in Mexico, the exhibition is divided into four sections: Encounter of Civilizations (16th Century), Creole Awakening (17th Century), Enlightened New Spain (18th Century), and Becoming Mexico (19th Century).

THE MUSEUM OF LATIN AMERICAN ART
"José Luis Cuevas: In Drawing and Sculpture"
Through August 28
628 Alamitos Avenue, Long Beach, California
molaa.org

Cuevas is one of Mexico's most important contemporary living artists. His work marked a new turn in Mexican art in the nineteen-fifties. Cuevas challenged institutionalized art from the Escuela Mexicana (Mexican School), focusing instead on creating a personal and expressionistic art, far from the idealism prevalent in the work of the muralists. The artist is known for his self-portraits and depictions of social outcasts.

Left to right: "Frida Kahlo with Fulang Chang," Fritz Henle, 1943; Cuevas' "La Familia del Circo #2," 1973; "Ma. Guadalupe Ramírez," Francisco Eduardo Tresguerras, 1787 an irreverent duet about people who shamelessly trumpet their good fortune, and "The Lifestyle," by the Roosters (Kate Garroway and Colleen Hooper), a wacky multimedia dance about (notional) female roosters. (421 Fifth Ave., at 8th St., Park Slope, Brooklyn. 718-832-0018. May 6 at 8 and May 7 at 7.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
May 4 at 8: In his freewheeling, postmodern production of Gounod's **"Faust,"** Andrei Serban takes the risk of making the Metropolitan Opera part of New York's intellectual life; René Pape's costume changes—which include the classic Méphistophélès outfit of red doublet and feathered skullcap along with a muscular bodysuit that evokes a devil out of William Blake—quote from historical traditions without distracting us from the magnificence of his voice. Also with Roberto Alagna (in the title role), Veronica Villaroel, Kristine Jepson, and Dmitri Hvorostovsky; James Levine conducts. ♦ May 7 at 8: With Hung Yun replacing Hvorostovsky. ♦ May 10 at 8: With Yun and with Soile Isokoski, the opening-night Marguerite, replacing Villaroel. ♦ May 5 at 8: The final performance of Puccini's **"Turandot,"** with Audrey Stottler (in the title role), Janice Watson, Franco Farina, and Vitalij Kowaljow; Marco Armiliato. ♦ May 6 and May 9 at 8: An experienced cast—including Sylvie Valayre, Marcello Giordani, and James Morris—take their places for a springtime run of **"Tosca"**; James Conlon. ♦ May 7 at 1:30: **"La Clemenza di Tito"** has always had its detractors: why did Mozart, after the triumphs of the innovative Da Ponte operas and of "The Magic Flute," return to the outdated genre of the opera seria? But this is still Mozart, after all, and there is much to enjoy. Frank Lopardo (in the title role) and Luca Pisaroni join a wonderful quartet of women—Heidi Grant Murphy, Melanie Diener, Anne Sofie von Otter, and Sarah Connolly (making her Met début); Levine. (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

MANNES OPERA: "DIE ZAUBERFLÖTE"
Those who were turned away from Julie Taymor's sold-out "Magic Flute" at the Met can console themselves with this fully staged revival of Mozart's opera at the Kaye Playhouse, with a cast and orchestra from the Mannes School of Music conducted by Joseph Colaneri. (Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 212-772-4448. May 7 at 7:30 and May 8 at 3.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Leonard Slatkin conducts music by Bloch ("Schelomo," with a poetic veteran of the cello, Lynn Harrell, in the solo role), Strauss ("Symphonia Domestica"), and a work by the young composer Jefferson Friedman. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. May 5 at 7:30, May 6 at 2, and May 7 at 8.)

BAMBERGER SYMPHONIKER
The Bamberg, a distinguished Bavarian orchestra that plays with a distinctive Old World sound, marks its sixtieth birthday with a U.S. tour. Its conductor is Jonathan Nott, a young Briton who is taking his charges decisively into the realm of new music—especially that of Ligeti, a composer whose music he has recorded extensively. Each concert includes a selection of the composer's Études played by their preëminent interpreter, the pianist Pierre-Laurent Aimard. May 6 at 8: Ligeti's "Lontano" begins a program featuring Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4 (with Aimard), Mahler's "Todtenfeier," and Beethoven's "Leonore" Overture No. 3. ♦ May 8 at 8: Ligeti's "Atmosphères," the "Adagio" from Mahler's Tenth Symphony, and Beethoven's "Emperor" Concerto (also with Aimard). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500.)

AKADEMIE FÜR ALTE MUSIK BERLIN
No other early-music group seems to pack as much firepower as this German ensemble, whose inaugural U.S. tour includes a stop at Zankel Hall. The program features music by Handel, Vivaldi, Bach (including the First Orchestral Suite), and Geminiani. (212-247-7800. May 8 at 7:30.)

YOUNG CONCERT ARTISTS IRENE DIAMOND CONCERT
Every year, Y.C.A. offers several of its award winners a showcase concert. The marimba player Naoko Takada, the trumpeter David Guerrier, and the cellist Alexandre Bouzlov perform works by Haydn, Lalo, and Kevin Puts with the Orchestra of St. Luke's conducted by Leonard Slatkin. (Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St. 212-307-6656. May 10 at 7:30.)

ORPHEUS CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
The spare luxury of Sofia Gubaidulina's music graces the conductorless chamber orchestra's latest concert; Joshua Bell performs in the New York première of her "Concordanza," after soloing in Saint-Saëns's Violin Concerto No. 3 in B Minor. Prokofiev's "Classical" Symphony and Sibelius's incidental music to "Pelleas and Melisande" complete the program. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. May 10 at 8.)

STRING ORCHESTRA OF NEW YORK CITY
The ensemble, always a friend to living composers, performs a "Cantabile" by the Latvian master Peteris Vasks as well as music by Arvo Pärt, Einojuhani Rautavaara (including the Suite for Strings), and Sibelius. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. May 10 at 8.)

RECITALS

"MIDTOWN CONCERTS" SERIES: ARTEK
Gwendolyn Toth, on harpsichord, leads her fine early-music band of voices and instruments in music by Buxtehude and other German composers in a short lunchtime concert. (Church of St. Francis of Assisi, 135 W. 31st St. May 4 at 1:15. No tickets required.)

ITZHAK PERLMAN
The beloved violinist comes to Avery Fisher Hall to offer music by Mozart, Beethoven (the "Kreutzer" Sonata), Smetana, and a rare modern work (the New York première of Ellen Taaffe Zwilich's "Episodes for Violin and Piano"). Rohan De Silva accompanies him. (212-721-6500. May 4 at 8.)

"SOUND PROJECTIONS" SERIES: "THE END OF ST. PETERSBURG"
Lincoln Center begins a bold burst of film-music programming with a showing of the 1927 Soviet silent classic, a heavily propagandistic tale of a simple peasant caught up in the 1917 Revolution, with the 1992 score by Alfred Schnittke (which includes electronic contributions by his son Andrei). Stefan Asbury conducts the Asko Ensemble, a zealous Dutch new-music group. (Rose Theatre, Rose Building. 212-721-6500. May 4 at 8.)

"PERSPECTIVES: LEIF OVE ANDSNES"
The flawless Norwegian pianist, with some excellent colleagues, offers a run of concerts at Carnegie Hall. May 4 at 8: Andsnes backs up Christian Tetzlaff as the bracing violinist makes his Carnegie recital début in sonatas by Beethoven, Shostakovich, Mozart, and Grieg (the great Sonata No. 3 in C Minor). (Stern Auditorium.) ♦ May 6 at 7:30: In the first of two "Andsnes Project" concerts, Tetzlaff (along with the cellist Jean-Guihen Queyras, among others) joins the pianist for music by Janáček, Kurtág ("Hommage à R. Sch."), Schumann (the Piano Trio No. 3 in G Minor), and Matthias Ronnefeld, a greatly gifted neo-modernist composer from Denmark who died in 1986 at the age of twenty-seven. (Zankel Hall.) ♦ May 9 at 7:30: Andsnes's group grows to almost chamber-orchestra size as Queyras, the soprano Ann-Helen Moen, and several more musicians collaborate in more Ronnefeld ("Grodek," Op. 7), Janáček, and Kurtág, along with Bach's Keyboard Concerto No. 5 in F Minor and a selection of Dvořák's "Moravian Duets." (Zankel Hall.) (212-247-7800.)

BARGEMUSIC
A weekend of Brahms, with the violinist Mark Peskanov, the cellist Martti Rousi, and the pianist

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
A LUKEWARM HELL

JASHAR AWAN

The Devil usually gets the best lines, and in the Met's new production of Gounod's "Faust" he gets the best voice. On opening night, René Pape, as Méphistophélès, ruled the stage with brilliant bass tone, nutty dance steps, and obvious affection for the spotlight. That the Devil sang French with a German accent wasn't necessarily an implausibility. Otherwise, this was an uncertain stab at the once absurdly popular showpiece. Roberto Alagna, as Faust, started off alternately sharp and flat, then recovered to deliver a reasonably convincing "Salut, demeure chaste et pure." The usually excellent Soile Isokoski was too poised and cautious as Marguerite. Dmitri Hvorostovsky, as Valentin, was the picture of elegance, but he skimped on smoldering rage. Kristine Jepson was Pape's only rival in dramatic vigor. The production, by Andrei Serban, was a grab bag of religious kitsch, Moulin Rouge decadence, and bland pictorialism. This "Faust" should have been the star of the spring season, but, so far, much brighter sparks have come from Deborah Voigt and Carlos Alvarez in "Un Ballo in Maschera" and Angela Denoke in "Der Rosenkavalier."

—*Alex Ross*

Adam Golka. May 5-6 at 7:30: The Piano Sonata in F-Sharp Minor, the Cello Sonata in F Major, and the Piano Trio No. 2 in C Major. ♦ May 7 at 7:30 and May 8 at 4: The Three Intermezzi, Op. 117, the Piano Sonata in C Major, and the Piano Trio No. 3 in C Minor. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

JUILLIARD VOCAL ARTS HONORS RECITAL
Brian Zeger's topnotch group of young singers (including the soprano Erin Morley and the bass Matt Boehler) make a group début, performing songs by Mussorgsky, Falla, Berlioz, and Schubert. (Alice Tully Hall. May 5 at 8. For free tickets, which are required, call 212-769-7406.)

RUTH LAREDO: "THE RUSSIAN SPIRIT"
The veteran pianist offers a "concert with commentary" that includes works by Shostakovich, Rachmaninoff (a selection of songs), and Tchaikovsky (the piano suite "The Seasons" and the Piano Trio); the soprano Courtenay Budd and the St. Petersburg String Quartet join her. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. May 6 at 7.)

EIGHTH BLACKBIRD
The popular new-music sextet of winds, strings, percussion, and piano offers music by Frederic Rzewski, Jennifer Higdon ("Zaka"), George Perle ("Critical Moments 2"), and others in the bargain-priced "People's Symphony" series. (Washington Irving High School, Irving Pl. at 16th St. May 7 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

TOKYO STRING QUARTET
The distinguished quartet's latest concert continues the 92nd Street Y's celebration of Jewish composers who emigrated to America, a rubric that includes both the temporary resident Mahler (the one-movement Piano Quartet, with Reiko Uchida) and the U.S. citizen Schoenberg (the visionary Quartet No. 2 in F-Sharp Minor, with the soprano Amy Burton). Haydn's C Major Quartet, Op. 74, No. 1, will be performed in between them. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. May 7 at 8.)

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC ENSEMBLES
Members of the orchestra strut their stuff in music by Spohr (the Nonet in F, Op. 31), Sibelius (the String Quartet, "Voces Intimae"), and Fred Lerdahl ("Waltzes"). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. May 8 at 3.)

TABLES FOR TWO
SUSHI OF GARI

402 E. 78th St. (212-517-5340)—There are at least a couple of ways to eat well in New York—at an impeccably designed, total-experience restaurant, or at a low-profile, chowhoundish eatery. For the past seven years, Masatoshi (Gari) Sugio's establishment has belonged to the latter category, if in the worst-kept-secret kind of way. At Sushi of Gari, on the Upper East Side, Sugio holds court in the back corner of an unassuming space: white stucco walls, unflattering lighting, and flimsy tables. At the sushi bar, the waitress doesn't even bother handing you a menu: "You want the Gari special, right?" You do. The best way to move through it is piece by luscious piece, although if you're in a hurry, they'll make up a ten-piece platter. Specially mixed soy sauce is at hand, but you're better off without it, since Sugio's sushi has already been carefully calibrated for optimal flavor. There's marinated and seared cod and salmon topped with a crunchy fried tomato. Oyster casserole arrives in a heated shell, with rice nestled in behind the breaded, creamy shellfish. Sugio, blue-robed and rotund, jovially admonishes diners when they ask too many questions about what's on their plate.

Over on the West Side, Gari, which opened at 370 Columbus Avenue in January, has plate-glass windows looking out at the back of the Museum of Natural History and a gorgeous, expansive wooden sushi bar. At the tables, the chopsticks are adorned with a frilly ribbon, and the menus are stylishly translucent. Sugio's signature sushi is still on offer, but entrées are given the star treatment: buttery, lightly spiced lobster, or a sweetly marinated sea bass. Maybe it's the absence of the Master himself—chef duties fall mainly to his protégé, Mike Lim—but the sushi seems somehow paler, and the entrées, while satisfactory, are a bit boring. The clientele is elegant: women in fur and dapper men who politely pull out their chairs. But at Sushi of Gari, part of the charm is the convivial atmosphere, with families crammed around a table, businessmen with jackets off and sleeves rolled up, and Sugio leaning over to tell a joke. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays for dinner. Entrées $8.75-$65.)

—*Andrea Thompson*

MOVIES OPENING

BROTHERS
Two brothers must negotiate shifting family dynamics when one is sent to war in Afghanistan, in a drama directed by Susanne Bier. In Danish. Opening May 6. (Angelika Film Center.)

CRASH
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening May 6.

DOUBLE DARE
A documentary about two Hollywood stuntwomen: an up-and-comer in her twenties and a veteran in her sixties. Directed by Amanda Micheli. Opening May 6. (Quad Cinema.)

THE GIRL FROM MONDAY
People are traded on a market as commodities, in a futuristic comic drama written and directed by Hal Hartley. Opening May 4. (Pioneer Theatre.)

LE GRAND RÔLE
An actor gets a break when he is cast as Shylock in "The Merchant of Venice," and at the same time his wife becomes ill. Directed by Steve Suissa. In French and Yiddish. Opening May 6. (Quad Cinema.)

A HOLE IN ONE
Michelle Williams plays a young woman who believes that a lobotomy will resolve her struggle with mental illness, in a drama directed by Richard Ledes. Opening May 6. (Village East Cinemas.)

HOUSE OF WAX
A horror film in which a group of friends fall prey to a sinister plot en route to a sporting event. With Elisha Cuthbert, Chad Michael Murray, and Paris Hilton. Opening May 6. (In wide release.)

JIMINY GLICK IN LALAWOOD
Martin Short plays a movie critic who gets involved in a murder investigation at the Toronto Film Festival. Opening May 6. (Angelika Film Center and Empire 25.)

KINGDOM OF HEAVEN
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening May 6. (In wide release.)

A MAN'S GOTTA DO
In an Australian comedy directed by Chris Kennedy, a hit man becomes involved in his engaged daughter's life. Opening May 6. (Quad Cinema.)

MYSTERIOUS SKIN
Gregg Araki directed this drama about two teenage boys from Kansas dealing with abuse from their past. Opening May 6. (Film Forum.)

UP FOR GRABS
A comic documentary about two men fighting over a million-dollar baseball, directed by Michael Wranovics. Opening May 6. (Cinema Village and Empire 25.)

WRITER OF O
A documentary about Dominique Aury, the Gallimard editor who anonymously wrote "Story of O." Directed by Pola Rapaport. In English and French. Opening May 4. (Film Forum.)

NOW PLAYING

À TOUT DE SUITE
In 1975, Lili (Isild Le Besco), a quiet upper-bourgeois Parisian girl bored with her twin roles as daughter and art student, abruptly takes up with a handsome, gentle-looking boy (Ouassini Embarek) of Moroccan descent. The boy turns out to be a bank robber. Wanted by the police, he takes her off to Spain, Morocco, and then Greece, where he abandons her and she drifts around on her own. Based on the actual experience of Elisabeth Fanger (who wrote a memoir called "When I Was 19"), Benoît Jacquot's film holds our interest with the arbitrariness of its heroine's behavior. We have no idea why she falls so heedlessly for this particular boy, who is virtually silent, or why anyone else does what he does. In the movie's proud refusal to explain or open up the characters, one can discern decades of French dedication to the *acte gratuit* as well as to elements of the terse anti-psychological dramaturgy favored by the New Wave directors. Jacquot shoots his tale in rather muddy, low-contrast black-and-white, and his young star's expressions alternate between radiant longing and a blankness so complete that one wonders at times if the heroine isn't merely stupid. This surly celebration of freedom isn't really satisfying or fun, but, then, it's not intended to be. In French.—*David Denby* (Angelika Film Center.)

THE BEST OF YOUTH
Six hours is a long time to spend in the company of somebody else's family, although, to be fair, it beats having to spend six hours in the company of one's own. Thanks to the director Marco Tullio Giordana, we are granted access to the Caratis, a fictional Roman clan, whose story, starting in 1966, covers more than thirty years and shows in two blocks of three hours. We follow the aging of the Carati parents and the progress of their four children—above all, of Nicola (Luigi Lo Cascio), smiling and slightly guarded, who grows up to be a psychologist, and of his handsome brother Matteo (Alessio Boni), whose rage for order finds him joining the police. When Nicola's partner, Giulia (Sonia Bergamasco)—her political principles as severe as her cheekbones—walks out on him and joins a terrorist cell, the stage is set for confrontation; to Giordana's credit, such clashes do not feel like a contrivance. The pace of the work, more leisurely than sluggish, allows the characters to clasp and hold our attention, to show as much bafflement as decisiveness, and to be brushed, rather than overwhelmed, by the major motions of history. In Italian, though, given the symphonic range of hand movements on display, the subtitles are largely redundant.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 4/25/05.) (Cinema Village.)

CRASH
A brazenly alive and heartbreaking film about the rage and foolishness of intolerance—the mutual abrasions of white, black, Latino, Middle Eastern, and Asian citizens in the great and strange city of Los Angeles. The movie starts off with separate vignettes in which the characters run afoul of each other, say things better left unsaid, and get into terrible trouble. Later, they cross paths again, sometimes in bizarre coincidences that feel exactly right; some of these scenes play out at the edge of insanity, where contentiousness spills over into tragedy or farce. The furiously candid screenplay was written by Paul Haggis and Robert Moresco, and the picture was directed by Haggis, who, in his first time out as director, demonstrates an

amazing skill with actors. Don Cheadle, as a withdrawn, melancholy police detective, is the star, and the other players include Terrence Howard and Thandie Newton as an upper-class African-American couple, Brendan Fraser and Sandra Bullock as an L.A. district attorney and his bitchy wife, Chris (Ludacris) Bridges and Larenz Tate as carjackers, Matt Dillon and Ryan Phillippe as cops, and Shaun Toub as an Iranian shopkeeper who thinks everyone is out to cheat him. The gentle electronic score is by Mark Isham.—*D.D.* (5/2/05) (In wide release.)

ENRON: THE SMARTEST GUYS IN THE ROOM

A mediocre documentary about the rise, fall, and utter disintegration of the Houston-based energy outfit that hid its debts in paper companies, colluded with an outside accounting firm, and managed for years to con the press, the financial community, and investors. There are a few startling moments—the executives Ken Lay and Jeff Skilling rousing Enron employees with inane and fraudulent boasts as the company was falling apart, an audiotape of conversations between Enron electricity traders merrily fleecing the state of California during its energy crisis. But much of the material is familiar, and the director, Alex Gibney, indulges in lazy cinematic sarcasm rather than telling us what we want to know: how the company worked when it was a legitimate firm; when, exactly, it began to go bad; and what the paper "entities" set up by the convicted chief financial officer Andrew Fastow actually did or were supposed to do. Based on the excellent 2004 book by the reporters Bethany McLean and Peter Elkind, who offer lucid commentary in the movie but cannot save it from being a poor substitute for their own hard work.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

FEVER PITCH

A conventional Farrelly-brothers comedy that plugs into something curious along the way. Jimmy Fallon plays a joke-happy Boston schoolteacher who successfully woos Drew Barrymore's high-flying corporate consultant, only to lose her to his obsession with the Boston Red Sox. The teacher's house, down to the Yankee toilet paper, is a Sox mausoleum; he spends his summers in a box seat passed down by his uncle, surrounded by fans who have been muttering the same curses and masochistic riffs for decades. The filmmakers are split between making the Sox obsession a lovably funny quirk and suggesting that it's haplessly infantile. Plotted against the 2004 season, the movie ends with the team's surprise World Series victory. One doesn't expect a sequel in which Sox fans have come down from the grandeur of endless defeat and are forced to confront the banality of success.—*D.D.* (4/18/05) (In wide release.)

THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

THE HOLY GIRL

Amalia (María Alche), a radiantly beautiful teenager growing up in a family-run hotel in a small Argentine city, is pulled between traditional religious teachings that insist on a saintlike career for women and sexual longings that are just as fierce as a teenage boy's. When a doctor attending a conference rubs up against her in a crowd, she reaches out to him, but he doesn't want an affair; he just wants to touch. Lucrecia Martel's gently comic movie is not about perversion; it's about the varieties of intimacy—between mothers and daughters, teen-age girls, doctors and patients. Martel shoots her movie with rapt attention to faces and bodies in the foreground while the life of the hotel spins loosely in the background. It's a distinctive visual style, but it's not a dramatic style, and the movie, for all its talent, isn't pulled together enough. Yet Martel is someone to watch: she has a fantastic eye for detail and mood. With Mercedes Morán as the heroine's divorced mother and Carlos Belloso as the doctor. In Spanish.—*D.D.* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

THE INTERPRETER

The new Sydney Pollack movie is set at the United Nations: not the bear pit of recent wrangling but a barely ruffled pool of international good will. Among its many altruists is Silvia Broome (Nicole Kidman), an interpreter who was raised in Africa. One night, she hears what she believes to be the murmurings of a plot: a plan to kill Edmond Zuwanie (Earl Cameron), the murderous president of Matobo, a fictitious African republic. She has cause to hate him, but does that make her a suspect as well as a witness? On her case is Keller (Sean Penn), a Secret Service agent and purveyor of universal sadness. He starts to investigate Silvia and inches toward the verge of falling in love; if the movie were ten hours long, one could easily picture the two of them throwing caution to the wind and going out for a drink. The plot, meanwhile, follows an unusual course, rising to a tense and wiry scene involving a baddie, a bomb, and a bus but slumping to a thrill-free finale, whose credibility will explode if you say the words "swipe card" out loud. With Catherine Keener, thank heaven, as a fellow-agent, and the only person present to see the joke.—*A.L.* (4/25/05) (In wide release.)

KUNG FU HUSTLE

The director Stephen Chow (he also wrote, produced, and stars) assembled this fantastic martial-arts film as cleverly as Tex Avery approached animation. Characters run down the road at superspeed, take flowerpots to the head without a whimper, and fly through the air deliriously. The plot, about a group of over-the-hill, tenement-living kung-fu masters with superpowers who fight a group of axe-wielding gangsters, is anarchic; the cast of Hong Kong actors is comic perfection, especially Yuen Qiu (who plays a hair-curlered, cigarette-smoking landlady). The computer-enhanced stunt work is astonishing, but it's Chow's ability to find the humor in his flights of fancy that's truly distinctive. In Cantonese and Mandarin.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

LOOK AT ME

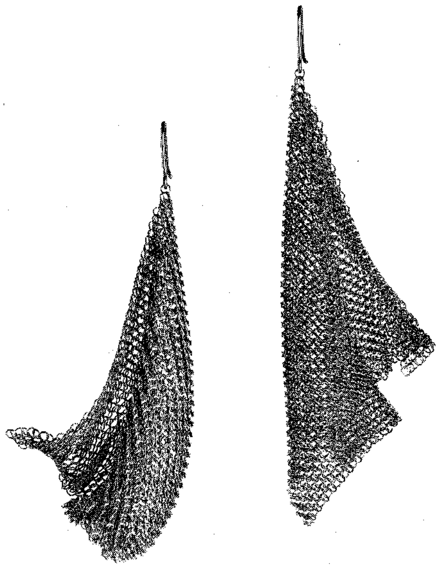
In this wonderful new film by the team of Agnès Jaoui (who acts, writes, and directs) and Jean-Pierre Bacri (who acts and writes), Bacri is a Parisian bigshot publisher and writer, and young Marilou Berri is his grievously overweight and unloved daughter, who can't get past a disco bouncer but attains something like happiness when she sings Handel and Mozart with her choral group. Around this aggravated father-daughter vacuum, Jaoui and Bacri assemble the elements of the Parisian publishing and music worlds, and their theme is egocentricity—the unconscious selfishness that cuts people off even from those they are closest to. Bacri's big cheese, a monster of self-centeredness, is the villain of the piece, but the condition is shown to be universal. A tender, indignant, but also very worldly movie. In French.—*D.D.* (4/4/05) (In wide release.)

LOVE AFFAIR

With Charles Boyer as the international playboy who falls hard for a headstrong American (Irene Dunne) on a voyage to New York, Leo McCarey's 1939 comedy-cum-tearjerker is a classic—the prototype of the "You'll laugh! You'll cry!" kind of movie. (It seems like even more of a pop miracle after two leaden remakes: McCarey's own "An Affair to Remember," with Cary Grant and Deborah Kerr, and Glenn Gordon Caron's "Love Affair," with Warren Beatty and Annette Bening.) Boyer delivers an incomparably fluent romantic performance. He turns worldliness into a quality at once frank and innocent, and Dunne responds to him superbly, melting into him as he bids her good night. While the two weigh their shipboard romance against the prosaic mates who await them in Gotham, they conjure a beguiling blend of suavity and fervor. The film careers into melodrama when the two debark, planning to meet six months later at the top of the Empire State Building. But McCarey builds to his heart-tug climax with a kitschy daring: the director and his stars never lose their conviction, and the final scene is a genuine emotional twister. McCarey and Mildred Cram cooked up the story, Delmer Daves and Donald Ogden Stewart got credit for the script, and several other writers worked on it, including S. N. Behrman.—*Michael Sragow* (Museum of Modern Art; May 8.)

MALINA

In one of the rare truly visual films about writers, the director Werner Schroeter generates extravagant images to match the insights of the nameless writer he films—played with ferocious precision by Isabelle Huppert and dubbed into German by the early Wim



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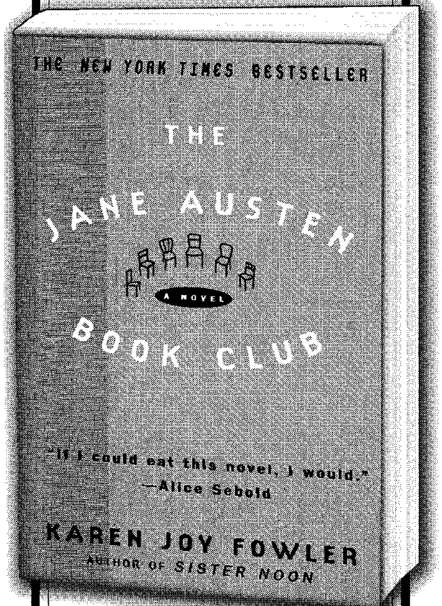
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Wenders muse Lisa Kreuzer. The creative frenzy of the mentally disintegrating poet—she writes in fury her oeuvre in ten thousand letters, leading her lover Malina to declare, "To you, mail is like a grenade with the pin out"—is matched by Schroeter's onrushing tracking shots, action darting into frame, and expressive lighting (the camerawork by Elfi Mikesch is original and brilliant). Working with a sharply lyrical adaptation by the 2004 Nobel Prize winner Elfriede Jelinek of Ingeborg Bachmann's cult novel, Schroeter follows the exquisite associative logic of poetry and madness. While at a children's film with another lover and his young sons, the poet dreams, and the fantasy sequence that results is breathtaking. Her story ends with a mirror game as intricate as the one in "The Lady from Shanghai," but to more quietly devastating effect. In German. Released in 1991.—*Richard Brody* (Anthology Film Archives; May 4 and May 7.)

MIDNIGHT COWBOY

Jon Voight as Joe Buck, a dishwasher from a small town in Texas, who hopes to make a living in New York by servicing rich women, and Dustin Hoffman as Ratso Rizzo, the crippled petty thief and con man he meets. The director, John Schlesinger, uses fast cutting and tricky camerawork to provide a satirical background as enrichment of the story, but the satire is offensively inaccurate—it cheapens the story and gives it a veneer of almost hysterical cleverness. The point of the movie must be to offer us some insight into the two derelicts—two of the many kinds of dreamers and failures in the city. But Schlesinger keeps pounding away at America, determined to expose how horrible the people are—he dehumanizes the people Joe Buck and Ratso are part of. If he could extend the same sympathy to the other Americans that he extends to them, the picture might make better sense. His spray of venom is just about overpowering, yet the two actors and the simple "Of Mice and Men" kind of relationship at the heart of the story save the picture. Hoffman's raspy voice and jumpy walk and Jon Voight's pallor and blue eyes and hurt, bewildered stare provide a core of feeling. From James Leo Herlihy's novel, adapted by Waldo Salt; cinematography by Adam Holender. Released in 1969.—*Pauline Kael* (Sunshine Cinema; May 6-7.)

MILLIONS

In a surprisingly sunny suburb of Manchester, two motherless little boys—one pious and generous (Alex Etel), the other enterprising and manipulative (Lewis McGibbon)—gain control of a Nike bag filled with cash after thieves throw it off a moving train. Will the secretive boys invest the money, give it to the poor, spend it on video games? And when will the nasty blackguards who stole the money show up, eager to recover the swag? "Millions," written by Frank Cottrell Boyce and directed by Danny Boyle, should have had the enchantment of "Empire of the Sun" or the recent Italian film "I'm Not Scared" or a dozen other child-centered stories and movies, but Boyle can't stop showing off his virtuosity. He changes camera speeds, zips through sequences, sends things flying through the air. We're supposed to be overwhelmed by magic, but what we see is fancy film technique and a lot of overstrained whimsy. To use special effects without coming off as glib, you may have to be a boy at heart yourself.—*D.D.* (3/21/05) (In wide release.)

PALINDROMES

A would-be outrage from the writer-director Todd Solondz that isn't forceful enough to get upset about. A thirteen-year-old girl from the New Jersey suburbs, Aviva, wants desperately to get pregnant and repeatedly begs a teen-age boy and a grown man to sleep with her. Throughout the film, Aviva is played by different actresses, including Jennifer Jason Leigh, who is forty-three—an attempt, apparently, to universalize the theme. The effect, however, is to end any possible emotional involvement in the material. At one point, Aviva falls into the hands of Christian right-to-lifers who take care of the lame, the halt, and the blind while plotting to murder a doctor who performs abortions. But the tone of this sequence falls uneasily between black comedy and a Diane Arbus-like fascination with the deformed; one doesn't know how to react to it. Both the satirical and the genuinely charitable intentions are weakened by hipster affectlessness: everyone in the picture is drab or stupid, and the movie itself is listless. With Ellen Barkin and Richard Masur as Aviva's anxious-to-do-right suburban parents.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

SAHARA

Clive Cussler's franchise novel about the adventurers Dirk Pitt (Matthew McConaughey) and Al Giordino (Steve Zahn) gets the big-bucks treatment in the director Breck Eisner's Indiana Jones-style romp. The overstuffed plot, a Cussler trademark, concerns a missing Civil War ship, a beautiful W.H.O. doctor (Penélope Cruz), and, of course, buried treasure. McConaughey gives Pitt an irresistible masculine charm and energy that helps link the plot together, and Zahn brings a joyous, look-at-me spontaneity to the action. Their performances complement and support each other, and Eisner, who has a great eye for location and detail, keeps the whole whirligig plot turning with lots of pop and lots of corn. A treat.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

SIN CITY

A few strands of melodrama have been pulled from Frank Miller's graphic novels and plaited together—just about—into a coherent comic-strip film. Miller himself co-directs, in collaboration with Robert Rodriguez (plus a little help from Quentin Tarantino), and there is certainly no letup, or pulled punches, in the heightening of style. The movie is in monochrome, splashed with occasional color, and the sheer force of overkill—the ear-crunching sound level, the disturbingly joyful violence—turns a sequence of horrific events into a stream of unfeeling comedy. The cast is a blast, including Bruce Willis, Michael Madsen, Clive Owen, Benicio Del Toro, a bewitching Carla Gugino, and a renascent Mickey Rourke, and most of them enter with sweat and gusto into the spirit of the thing—fortunately so, for without such eagerness the movie would feel merely cruel. What it has to tell us of life, let alone suffering, beyond the savage enchantment of the movies could be written on the head of a bullet.—*A.L.* (4/11/05) (In wide release.)

3-IRON

Kim Ki-duk ("Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter . . . and Spring") wrote, directed, and edited this exquisite modern morality tale that doubles as a ghost story. A handsome young man (Jae Hee) cruises the city on his motorcycle, canvassing neighborhoods both rich and poor and taping a printed flyer to each doorknob. When he returns and finds a flyer undisturbed, he expertly picks the lock and makes himself at home. He bathes, has a drink, prepares a meal from food found in the refrigerator, takes a few digital photos of himself, cleans, makes repairs, and leaves. He thinks he is moving through the world without disturbing it, but there are consequences to his actions. Lee Seung-yeon plays a woman who accompanies the interloper for a time; the two never exchange a word but share a tender romance and a scary, sometimes violent adventure. In Korean.—*Ken Marks* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

THE UPSIDE OF ANGER

Joan Allen, lurching into rooms and then speaking with the weird explicitness of an alcoholic trying to maintain control, is Terry Wolfmeyer, a suburban housewife who has been abandoned by her husband; Kevin Costner is Denny Davis, a sheepish retired baseball player whose hand always clutches a beer bottle. She's overdefined; he's undefined; and in the gaps between Terry's faltering attempts to raise her four beautiful, cranky daughters, Terry and Denny have an occasional meeting in bed. This domestic comedy, written and directed by Mike Binder (who performs well as Denny's sleazebag friend), takes its time and establishes a natural rhythm of quarrels, reconciliations, and serious talk. As the rancorous Terry, who can't stop herself from telling people off, Allen blooms into a great angry comedienne. With Evan Rachel Wood, Erika Christensen, Keri Russell, and Alicia Witt as the fab Wolfmeyer girls.—*D.D.* (4/4/05) (In wide release.)

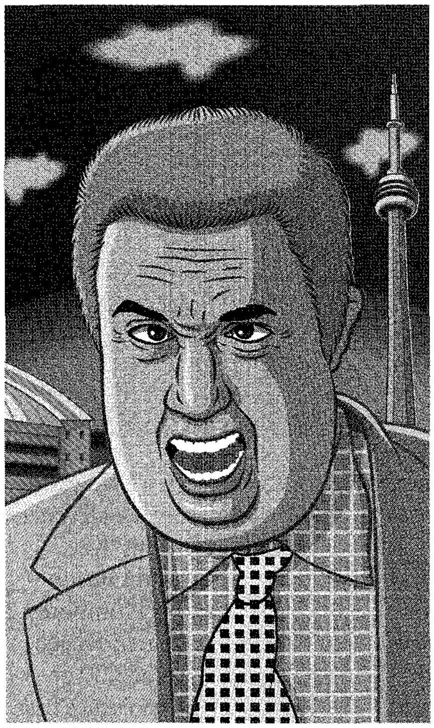
Also Playing

THE AMITYVILLE HORROR: In wide release. **LADIES IN LAVENDER:** Paris. **A LOT LIKE LOVE:** In wide release. **XXX: STATE OF THE UNION:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5110)— "After the Wall: German Films Since the Wende, 1989-2002." All films are in German. May 4 at 7 and May 7 at 4:30: "Malina" (†). ♦ May 4 at 9:30 and May 8 at 9:15: "Nowhere to Go" (2000, Oskar Roehler). ♦ May 5 at 7 and May 8 at 4:30: "The State I Am In" (2000, Christian Petzold). ♦ May 5 at 9:30 and May 8 at 7: "Black Box Germany" (2001, Andres Veiel). ♦ May 6 at 7 and May 10 at 9: "Life Is All You Get" (1997, Wolfgang Becker). ♦ May 6 at 9:30 and May 10 at 7: "No More Mr. Nice Guy" (1993, Detlev Buck). ♦ May 7 at 7 and May 9 at 9:15: "Grill Point" (2002, Andreas Dresen). ♦ May 7 at 9:30 and May 9 at 7: "Night Shapes" (1999, Dresen). ♦ "Hitoshi Toyoda: Journal Intimate." May 5 and May 7 at 7:30: "The Wind's Path" (2001; silent). ♦ May 6 and May 8 at 7:30: "Nazuna" (2003-04; silent).



MICHAEL WELDON

Martin Short in "Jiminy Glick in Lalawood," opening May 6.

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—Through May 8: "Filmland: Recent Finnish Film." May 4 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Eila" (2003, Jarmo Lampela; in Finnish). ♦ May 5 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Mothers of Life" (2001, Anastasia Lapsui and Markku Lehmuskallio; in Nenets and Russian). ♦ May 6 at 2 and 6:50: "The Life of Aleksis Kivi" (2002, Jari Halonen; in Finnish and Swedish). ♦ May 6 at 4:30 and 9:15: "Dog Nail Clipper" (2004, Markku Pölönen; in Finnish). ♦ May 7 at 2 and 6:50: "Seven Songs from the Tundra" (1999, Lapsui and Lehmaskallio; in Nenets and Russian). ♦ May 7 at 4:30 and 9:15: "Pearls and Pigs" (2003, Perttu Leppä; in Finnish). ♦ May 8 at 2 and 6:50: "My Friend Henry" (2004, Auli Mantila; in Finnish). ♦ May 8 at 4:30 and 9:15: "Handcuff King" (2002, Arto Koskinen; in Finnish and Swedish). ♦ "Paul Robeson Speaks!" May 9 at 7:30: "Body and Soul" (1925, Oscar Micheaux; silent). ♦ Through May 12: "A Tribute to Susan Sontag." May 10 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Devil Is a Woman" (1935, Josef von Sternberg).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Through May 17: The films of Harold Lloyd. May 4-5 at 1, 4:25, and 7:50: "Grandma's Boy" (1922, Fred C. Newmeyer; silent). ♦ May 4-5 at 2:35, 6, and 9:30: "Feet First" (1930, Clyde Bruckman). ♦ May 6-7 at 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, and 9:30: "The Freshman" (1925, Newmeyer and Sam Taylor; silent). ♦ May 8-9 at 2:05, 5:05, and 8:05: "For Heaven's Sake" (1926, Taylor; silent). ♦ May 8-9 at 3:20, 6:20, and 9:20: "The Milky Way" (1936, Leo McCarey). ♦ May 10 at 1, 4:25, and 7:50: "Doctor Jack" (1922, Newmeyer; silent). ♦ May 10 at 2:25, 5:50, and 9:15: "The Cat's Paw" (1934, Taylor).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—"Occupation of France Series." May 10 at 12:30, 4, and 7: "Le Franc-Tireur" (1972, Jean-Max Causse and Roger Taverne; in French).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Louis Feuillade: A Sampling of a Master." May 4 at 6:15 (Part I), May 5 at 6:15 (Part II), and May 7 at 1 (in its entirety): "Tih Minh" (1918; silent). ♦ "Lion of Hollywood: The Life and Legend of Louis B. Mayer." May 4 at 7: "The Big Parade" (1925, King Vidor; silent). ♦ May 5 at 5:30 and May 7 at 8:45: "Human Desire" (1919, Wilfrid North; silent). ♦ May 5 at 7:30 and May 7 at 7: "Sowing the Wind" (1921, John M. Stahl; silent). ♦ May 6 at 6: "The Human Comedy" (1943, Clarence Brown). ♦ May 9 at 5:45: "His Hour" (1924, Vidor; silent). ♦ May 6 at 8 and May 8 at 2: "Meet Me in St. Louis" (1944, Vincente Minnelli). ♦ May 9 at 7:30: "The Big Parade" (1930, Vidor). ♦ "112 Years of Cinema." May 6 at 8:30: "Grass: A Nation's Battle for Life" (1925, Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack; silent). ♦ May 7 at 2: "Mildred Pierce" (1945, Michael Curtiz). ♦ May 7 at 4:15: "Gloria" (1980, John Cassavetes). ♦ May 8 at 3:30: "Love Affair" (†). ♦ May 8 at 5: "All the King's Men" (1949, Robert Rossen). ♦ May 8 at 5:30: "Miller's Crossing" (1990, Joel Coen). ♦ May 9 at 5:30: "Little Caesar" (1931, Mervyn LeRoy).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—"Spring Recess Family Matinees." May 4 at 10:30 A.M.: "Buck Privates" (1941, Arthur Lubin). ♦ "Asian CineVisions." May 6 at 7:30: "A Peck on the Cheek" (2002, Mani Ratnam; in Tamil and Sinhala). ♦ "Candid Cameras: Real Life on Film." May 7-8 at 1: "The Secret Cinema" (1968, Paul Bartel). ♦ May 7-8 at 4:30: "Tarnation" (2003, Jonathan Caouette). ♦ May 7-8 at 2: "Grey Gardens" (1975, Ellen Hovde, Albert Maysles, David Maysles, and Muffie Meyer). ♦ Repertory nights. May 7-8 at 6:30: "Rio Bravo" (1959, Howard Hawks).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—Midnight movies. May 6-7: "Midnight Cowboy" (†).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—May 10 at 6: "The 400 Blows" (1959, François Truffaut; in French). ♦ May 10 at 8:30: "The Chorus" (2004, Christophe Barratier; in French).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—"The Unforgettable Comedy of Massimo Troisi." All films are in Italian. May 4 at 2 and May 5 at 8:45: "The Postman" (1994, Michael Radford). ♦ May 4 at 4:15 and 9:15: "I Thought It Was Love" (1992, Troisi). ♦ May 5 at 1: "I'm Starting from Three" (1981, Troisi). ♦ Open-captioned films for the deaf and hard of hearing. May 5 at 3:30 and 6:15: "Sahara" (2005, Breck Eisner). ♦ "Michael Powell: Beauty Unending." May 6 at 1:30 and May 7 at 8:30: "Peeping Tom" (1960, Powell). ♦ May 6 at 3:30 and May 8 at 8: "The Tales of Hoffmann" (1951, Powell and Emeric Pressburger). ♦ May 6 at 6:15, May 7 at 1:30, and May 8 at 1: "The Thief of Bagdad" (1940, Ludwig Berger, Powell, and Tim Whe-

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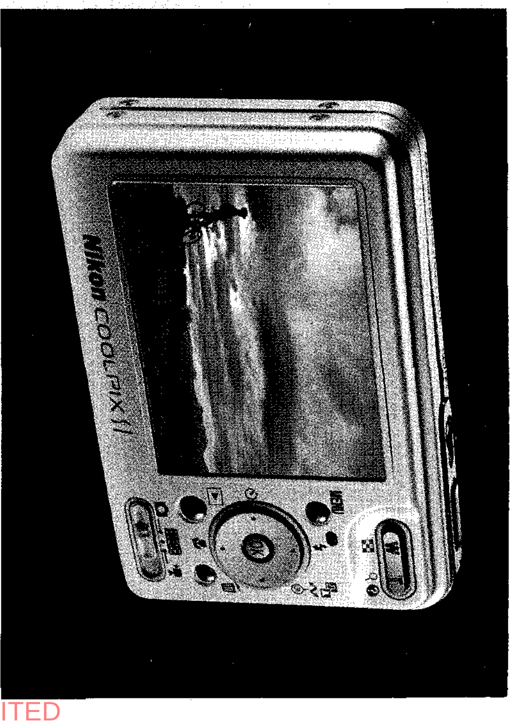


lan). ♦ May 6 at 8:30 and May 8 at 3:15: "The Red Shoes" (1948, Powell and Pressburger). ♦ May 7 at 3:45 and May 8 at 6: "Oh . . . Rosalinda!" (1955, Powell and Pressburger). ♦ May 7 at 6: An Evening with Thelma Schoonmaker. ♦ May 10 at 2: "Crown vs. Stevens" (1936, Powell). ♦ May 10 at 3:30: "Red Ensign" (1934, Powell). ♦ May 10 at 5: "Rynox" (1932, Powell). ♦ May 10 at 9: "The Phantom Light" (1935, Powell).

READINGS AND TALKS

"SWIMMING TO CAMBODIA"
Bob Holman, Reno, Roger Rosenblatt, and other writers pay tribute to the late Spalding Gray with a reading from his 1985 monologue. (Barnes & Noble, 33 E. 17th St. No tickets necessary. May 4 at 7.)

"CONVERSATIONS WITH CARTOONISTS"
The *New Yorker* cartoonist David Sipress interviews Lee Lorenz, who, in addition to having published more than fifteen hundred cartoons in the magazine, served as the cartoon editor from 1973 to 1997. (Dixon Place at the Marquee Theatre, 356 Bowery. For reservations, call 212-219-0736, ext. 106. May 4 at 7:30.)

"LIVE FROM THE NYPL"
John Patrick Shanley, who recently won a Pulitzer Prize for "Doubt," joins his fellow-playwrights John Guare ("Six Degrees of Separation"), Eric Bogosian ("SubUrbia"), and Stephen Adly Guirgis ("Jesus Hopped the A Train"), as well as the journalist Jonathan Vankin, to discuss the role of the author in the electronic age. (Celeste Bartos Forum, New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. 212-868-4444. May 4 at 9.)

BROOKLYN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
The Brooklyn poets Daniela Gioseffi, Kimiko Hahn, and Sapphire read original works inspired by their borough's most famous poet, Walt Whitman, in celebration of the hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of "Leaves of Grass." (128 Pierrepont St. 718-222-4111. May 7 at 2.)

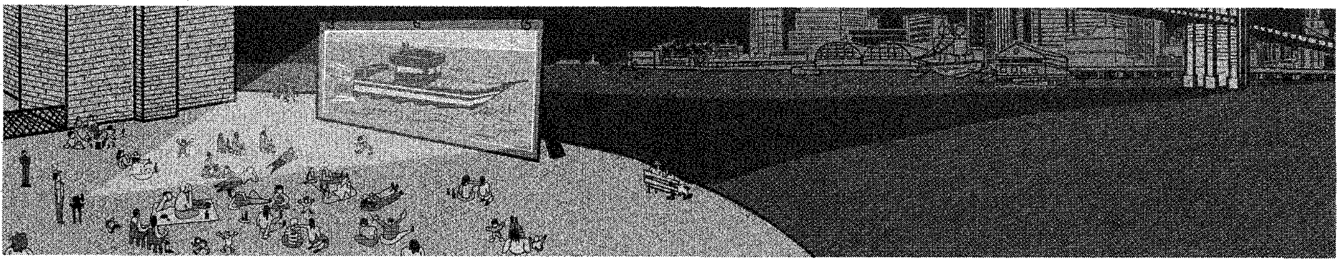
ABOVE AND BEYOND

"THE GREAT SAUNTER"
Shorewalkers, a nonprofit group dedicated to step-by-step explorations of the region's littoral zones, sets out on its annual circumambulation of Manhattan. The thirty-two-mile trek starts beside the stone canyons of the financial district, passes through twenty parks, including the hills and forests at the northern end of the island, and possesses one distinct advantage over hiking in the countryside—at just about any point you can hail a cab if you get tired. (May 7, starting at 7 A.M. For more information, call 212-330-7686, or visit www.shorewalkers.org.)

BROOKLYN HEIGHTS HOUSE TOUR
The arrival of Robert Fulton's steam ferry in 1814 helped turn Brooklyn's riverside farmland into one of the city's most beautiful neighborhoods. Wealthy merchants drawn by the area's sudden accessibility (one developer, Hezekiah Pierpont, described his property as "the nearest country retreat") constructed elegant brownstone and brick homes in Federal, Greek Revival, Italianate, and other popular architectural styles of the day. In 1965, thanks to the efforts of preservation-minded residents, the neighborhood became the city's first Historic District, and each year the Brooklyn Heights Association organizes a self-guided house and garden tour, giving those who didn't buy early the chance to explore the interiors of various town houses. This year's tour, which includes five historic residences, is scheduled for May 7, from 1 to 5. (For more information, call 718-858-9193, or visit www.brooklynheightsassociation.org.)

COLIN QUINN
The comedian performs a night of standup to benefit the writing lab at 826NYC, a nonprofit tutoring center for kids in his old neighborhood, Park Slope. With Todd Barry, Greg Giraldo, and others. (Zipper Theatre, 336 W. 37th St. Tickets at the door. May 9 at 8:30.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
Monet's "Les Bords de la Seine à Argenteuil," one of the highlights of a sale of Impressionist and modern art at **Sotheby's** (May 3-4), depicts as well as any painting the ways that industrialization fractured a previously pastoral world—*promeneurs* walk along the Seine while in the background a smokestack looms over a château. The more modern visions are boldly subjective. In a self-portrait, Max Beckmann holds a crystal ball, its shape echoed in the artist's bald pate and the deep half-circles under his eyes; Kandinsky's vividly colored "Two Riders and Reclining Figure" verges on abstraction. Works by Matisse and Magritte are comparatively serene. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ The selection of paintings at the evening session of **Christie's** sales of Impressionist and modern art (May 4-5) is impressive—it features such showstoppers as Degas's "La Loge" and Picasso's "Tête et Main de Femme"—but there is also a strong emphasis on sculpture, including major works by Brancusi, Giacometti, and Moore. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Swann**, a smaller house largely devoted to books, drawings, and posters, makes its own contribution with two wide-ranging sales of prints on May 5. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)



MAXIMILIAN BODE

ON THE HORIZON

CLASSICAL MUSIC
L.A. PHILHARMONIC
June 3 and June 5

Lincoln Center's Great Performers series winds up its season with a pair of concerts by Esa-Pekka Salonen and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. On June 3, the Russian pianist Alexander Toradze is the guest for a program of music by Stravinsky and Shostakovich. The June 5 concert features Ravel's "Daphnis et Chloé" and the New York première of John Adams's blissed-out "Dharma at Big Sur." (212-721-6500.)

ART
LEE FRIEDLANDER
June 5–Aug. 29

Friedlander, born in 1934, started off photographing artists for jazz album covers and branched out into flowers, parties, televised images, and landscapes taken from moving cars. MOMA'S retrospective includes more than five hundred photographs. (212-708-9400.)

NIGHT LIFE
STEPHEN MALKMUS
July 4

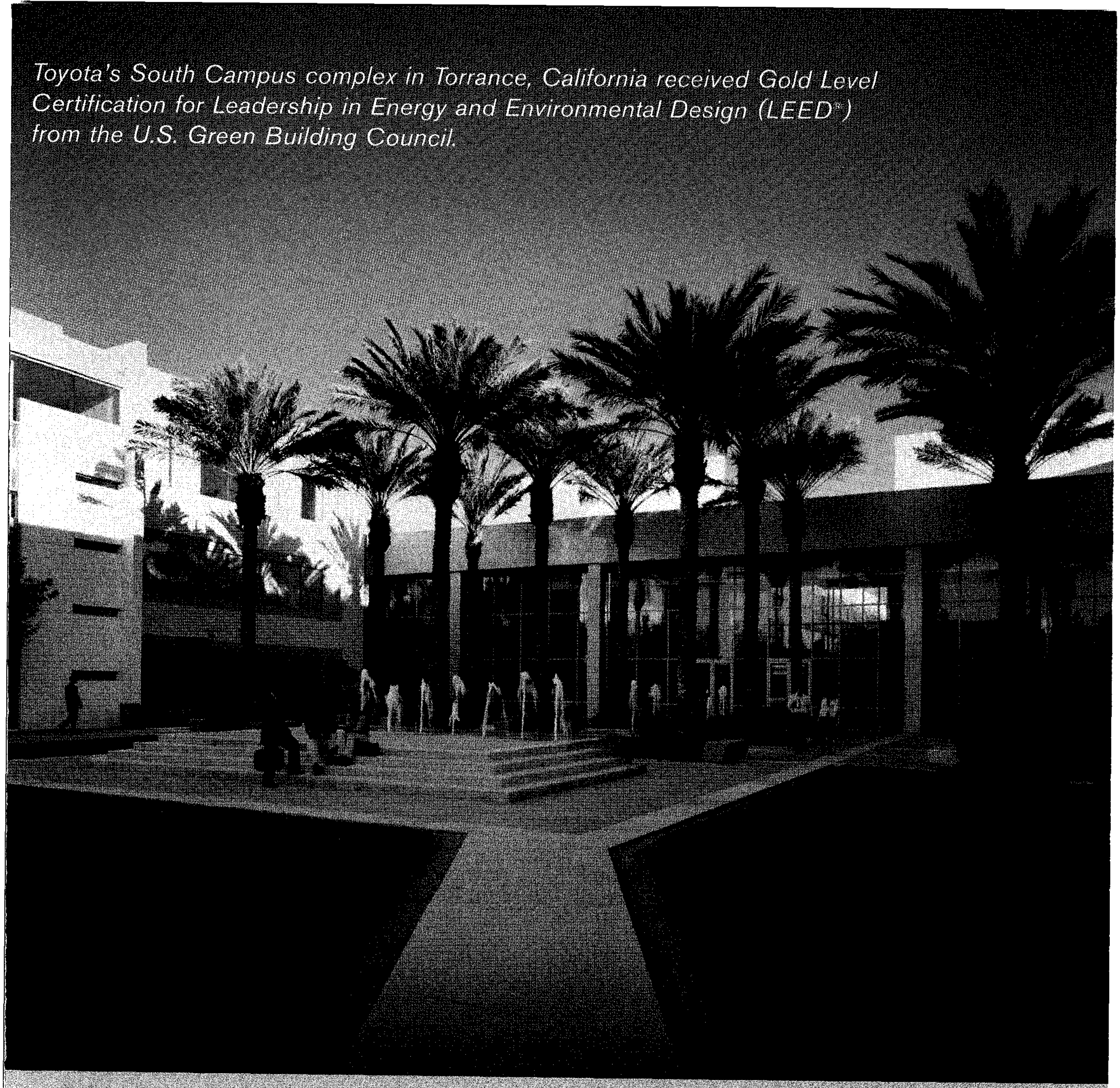
As the lead singer and songwriter for Pavement, Malkmus was one of the defining figures of nineties college rock. He has become an elder statesman by continuing to make more or less the same kind of music, including his new album, "Face the Truth." Yo La Tengo, the august Hoboken trio, will split the bill with Malkmus and his band the Jicks in Battery Park. (212-835-2789.)

MOVIES
BROOKLYN FILM
July 7–Aug. 11

Summer brings outdoor screens and lawn seating. The Empire-Fulton Ferry State Park's summer film series takes place on Thursdays, in the shadow of the Brooklyn Bridge. This year's movies, all water-related, begin with "Key Largo," the John Huston thriller starring Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall. The film starts at 8:30 or dusk, whichever comes first. (718-802-0603.)

THE THEATRE
"THE MAMBO KINGS"
July 20

Oscar Hijuelos's novel was made into a movie that starred Armand Assante and Antonio Banderas; now it's a musical with Billy Dee Williams and Esai Morales. Previews begin July 20; the show opens Aug. 18. (212-239-6200.)



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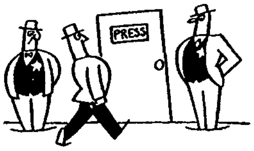
THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
THE MATT AND JUDY SHOW



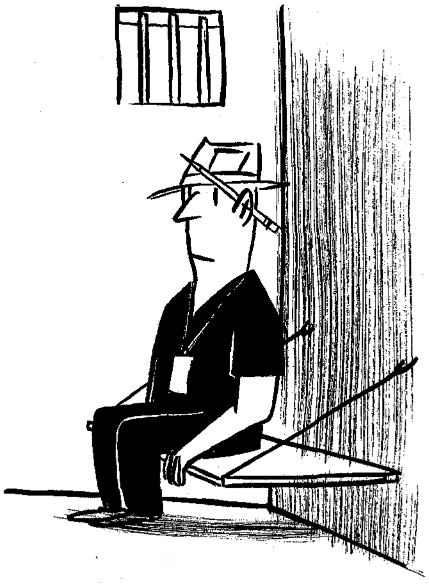
It's beginning to look, in retrospect, as if Novak buried the lead.

In his column for July 14, 2003, Robert Novak, the cable-TV growler and syndicated inside-dopester, wrote about backbiting within the Bush Administration over one of the more egregious intelligence fiascoes of the runup to the Iraq war: the claim, as the President himself had put it six months earlier, in his State of the Union address, that "Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa." This claim, one of two specific pieces of evidence presented in that speech as proof of an urgent Iraqi nuclear threat, quickly fell apart; it turned out to have been based entirely on crudely forged documents provided by someone described in the newspapers as a "con man" working through "Italian intelligence"—irresistibly suggesting a cross between Groucho and Chico. (Bush's other piece of evidence, which had to do with aluminum tubes, proved bogus, too.)

Bush should have known better. About a year before his speech, the Central Intelligence Agency had dispatched a retired Foreign Service officer, Joseph C. Wilson IV, to Niger to assess the reliability of the uranium rumor. Wilson knew the territory, having served the first President Bush as chargé d'affaires in Baghdad and as Ambassador to Gabon, and President Clinton as the National Security Council's Africa specialist. Wilson's findings cast serious doubt on the truth of the rumor. They were ignored. Then, after the United States went to war, Wilson went public on the Op-Ed page of the *Times*, concluding that "some of the intelligence related to Iraq's nuclear weapons program was twisted to exaggerate the Iraqi threat."

Novak's column came out a week later. For the first few hundred words, it rambled on about "finger-pointing between Bush Administration agencies" in the wake of Wilson's Op-Ed. The "nut graf," as they say on the copy desk, came halfway through:

> Wilson never worked for the CIA, but his wife, Valerie Plame, is an agency operative on weapons of mass destruction. Two senior administration officials told me his wife suggested sending Wilson to Niger to investigate the Italian report.



Now, that was news, given that the names, identities, and assignments of covert C.I.A. operatives (as Valerie Plame has been) are supposed to be a secret. Someone, it seemed, had been talking out of turn, and not just to Bob Novak. Three days later, on *Time's* Web site, Matthew Cooper, the magazine's White House correspondent, and two colleagues wrote that "some government officials have noted to *Time* in interviews (as well as to syndicated columnist Robert Novak) that Wilson's wife, Valerie Plame, is a C.I.A. official who monitors the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction." Cooper's angle was the reverse of Novak's—the import of the latter's story was to discredit Wilson, of the former's to discredit Wilson's discreditors—but the officials doing the talking were almost certainly the same. And they were talking to others, too, including Judith Miller, of the *Times*, who gathered string but never wrote a story.

That was the beginning of an extraordinary politico-journalistic drama, which, nearly two years later, is approaching its climax. In the effort to discover the leakers, a special prosecutor was appointed; a grand jury was impanelled; witnesses, ranging from President Bush on down to lowly scribes, were called or subpoenaed. Cooper and Miller, citing a common-law and, they argued, First Amendment privilege of confidentiality, declined to name their sources. A fed-

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

eral judge found them in contempt and ordered that they be imprisoned for up to eighteen months, a directive that has since been upheld twice. Now all that stands between jail and the two reporters, who were merely doing their jobs and keeping their promises, is the Supreme Court, or a sudden attack of prosecutorial discretion.

The Cooper-Miller case is rife with ironies and curiosities. Everything about it is upside down. In the ideal template, the person being protected is an unnamed whistle-blower trying to expose government wrongdoing. This time, the protectee or protectees are unnamed government wrongdoers trying to discredit a (named) whistle-blower. Normally, the reporter is being told to testify about his or her knowledge of a crime; this time, the reporter's conversation—the source's half of it, anyway—is itself the crime, if a crime there was. Normally, in recent years, the threats to the Washington press corps's ability to do its job have come from the Bush Administration, which is notoriously secretive, manipulative, and vindictive to journalists who fail to bend the knee. This time, though, the threat is coming from an investigation, a perfectly legitimate one, that targets the Administration, or persons within it, precisely for misusing the press—in this case, by ruining the career of a C.I.A. operative. Then, there is the role of Robert Novak. It was Novak who outed the agent, but it is not Novak who is in trouble. Was he subpoenaed? If not, why not? If he was, and he refused to name his source, why isn't he in the same jail-bound boat as they are? If he did name names, why the relentless pursuit of Cooper and Miller? No one knows—except Novak and the prosecutors.

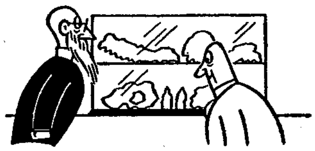
Among other things, the entire brouhaha illuminates the changing meaning of the C.I.A. as a political trope. In the nineteen-forties and fifties, C.I.A. agents were swashbuckling, sophisticated Ivy Leaguers. In the sixties and seventies, they were conspirators against populist governments the world over. In the eighties and nineties, they were the Spy vs. Spy spooks of the later Cold War. Once, they were the left's favorite villain. That changed when the agency's analysts proved unable to provide intelligence that consistently and precisely corresponded with the preconceptions of the Bush-Cheney team. Now matters have reached a point where associating a diplomat with a C.I.A. agent (his wife) is apparently thought sufficient to smear him as a Saddam-appeasing, liberal-loving softie.

The law that has sideswiped Matthew Cooper and Judith Miller, the Intelligence Identities Protection Act, was passed in 1982. It was aimed at treacherous government officials and also at the sort of activist journalists, pretty much exclusively of the left, who might (and on a few occasions did) set out to expose agents with the intent of compromising their safety or, at the very least, making their work impossible. Whether the act applies to the Plame outing is a debatable point. (Two of its primary drafters are on record as saying that it does not.) So, for that matter, is the question of whether the confidentiality of sources should be seen as a constitutional right or—as it is in thirty-one states and the District of Columbia but not, unfortunately, at the federal level—a privilege both guaranteed and circumscribed by law. If anyone is indicted, it will likely be on some secondary charge, such as perjury or lying to investigators. Cooper and Miller are not targets of the investigation. But they may yet be forced to a choice between breaking their promise and going to jail; and it is a near-certainty that, as a matter of personal and professional honor, they would choose the latter. There is, then, a strong possibility that (a) a serious abuse of power, possibly a crime, will have been committed by one or more White House officials, and (b), in consequence, two journalists will have been imprisoned. That would be a strange kind of justice, and a singularly grim parody of accountability.

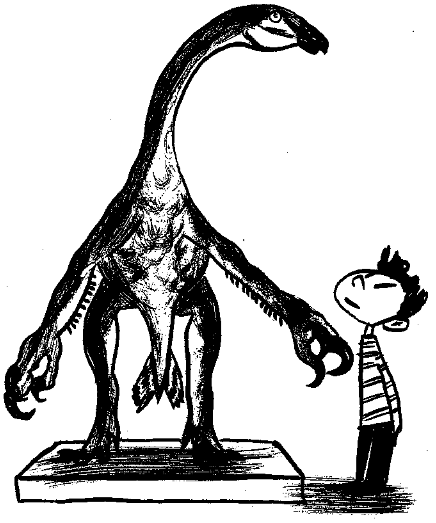
—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

DEPT. OF PALEONTOLOGY

DINOMITE



Mark Norell is the all-knowing curator of the extremely cool, truly awesome, and very soon to open "Dinosaurs: Ancient Fossils, New Discoveries" show at the American Museum of Natural History. "He looks just like Steve Martin," a ten-year-old whispered politely to a companion one afternoon last week, after taking in Norell's expressive eyebrows and oversized jaw and handsome, slightly supercilious smile. Norell's manner is rather early-Martinish, too—good-natured, genial, and tempered by just a little bit of asperity. (When asked if the T. rex is now widely regarded as a scavenger or as a hunter, he answers, "I think that's sort of a non-question, actually.")



Beipiaosaurus

The ten-year-old, hence to be called L., was there with his five-year-old sister, whom we'll label O.—L. frankly being one for whom dinosaurs are, like, so over, and O. one for whom they are also, like, so over but still a source of some worrying uncertainty. It is the existence of a generation of children who already know everything about dinosaurs and can therefore be so over them by the age of five, however, that enabled Norell to do this show: "The thing about dinosaurs is that people, even children, know the basic facts to an extraordinary degree—the comet, the carnosaurs, scavengers versus hunters—so that, paradoxically, a popular show about dinosaurs allows you to do a more sophisticated show about scientific problem-solving than you can in almost any other field in the museum."

The new exhibition will obviously be a monster for the museum, since it is filled with totally sweet animated figures and titanium-type dino skeletons, but the point of the show, surprisingly subtle and complex, is to demonstrate all the ways in which new approaches in biology increase our understanding of the his-

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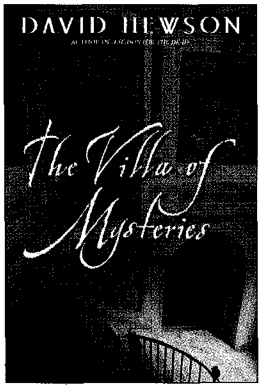

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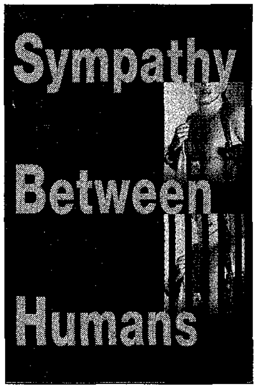

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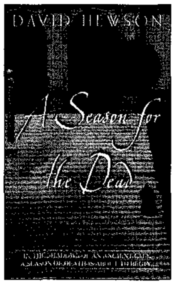

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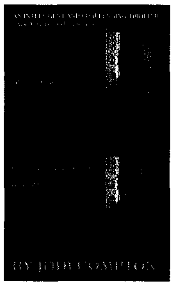

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tory of life, and to illustrate the argumentative way in which science actually proceeds. The first issue that the show examines, for instance, is how quickly the T. rex grew and how fast it ran. The old upright Godzilla was replaced, a decade ago, by a speedy, hunched-over S.U.V. of death, but this turns out to be only a partial truth. "Using computer technology, we've been able to back-engineer his gait and his speed, and learned that an animal of this size couldn't have run more than twenty-five miles per hour," Norell explained.

"So, could you outrun a T. rex?" L. asked cautiously.

"In a sprint," Norell answered.

A nearby display demonstrates that the old idea of the apatosaurus having a long neck in order to reach up to eat from the tops of trees, giraffe style, wasn't physically possible. And a still cooler display, mounted on a wall, as if in Fred Flintstone's trophy room, shows a series of horns and crests belonging to various members of the ceratopsian family, which includes the triceratops.

"What the horns and crests of the triceratops were there for is a fascinating and contested question," Norell said. "There are three possibilities: protection, display, and species identification." Protection obviously means fighting. Display, or sexual selection, implies that the triceratops males were just trying to impress the babes with the size of their crests and horns. And the identification hypothesis proposes that, what with a lot of dinosaurs around looking more or less alike even to other dinosaurs, a triceratops needed to be able to spot a fellow-triceratops instantly, and so triceratops wore horns and crests in much the same way that conventioneers wear those "Hi! I'm Nate from Sales" badges. "So far, we've learned that many of these structures are very fragile, which implies that they wouldn't be very good for protection," Norell said.

"I think fighting," O. said. "They have the fighting look."

"Probably could be all three," Norell added sagely. "I mean, if a tyrannosaur does attack you, you wouldn't just stand there."

The show's pièce de résistance is a fantastically detailed diorama of both the habitat and the forms of the newly discovered feathered dinosaurs from northeast China. They are Norell's specialty, and he talks about them with special affection.

"They were feathered and flightless, and coexisted with true avian dinosaurs—what we call birds. Why they were feathered and flightless isn't completely understood yet. Display? Insulation? But they're fascinating. There's microraptor, for instance, who has two complete sets of wings, one above his chest and one below. Why? We don't know yet. But we're trying to test him in a wind tunnel to see if there's some aerodynamic advantage to it."

"*That* looks like a turtle," O. said, examining the ancient fauna. "But a more *dangerous* kind of turtle."

L. surveyed the strange and beautiful diorama of life on earth as it looked a hundred and thirty million years ago. "It looks a bit like Canada," he said.

Norell smiled his Steve Martin smile. "Actually, to get the look right, the artist went out and studied certain parts of New Jersey."

—*Adam Gopnik*

THE PICTURES

TWO DAMES

Judi Dench and Maggie Smith, both holders of the title Dame Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, flew in from London the other day to help promote the Tribeca Film Festival première of "Ladies in Lavender," in which they play sisters. Their plane landed at 5:10 P.M.; by 7 P.M., they were seated in the restaurant of the Ritz-Carlton hotel in Battery Park, valiantly projecting good nature about their mission.

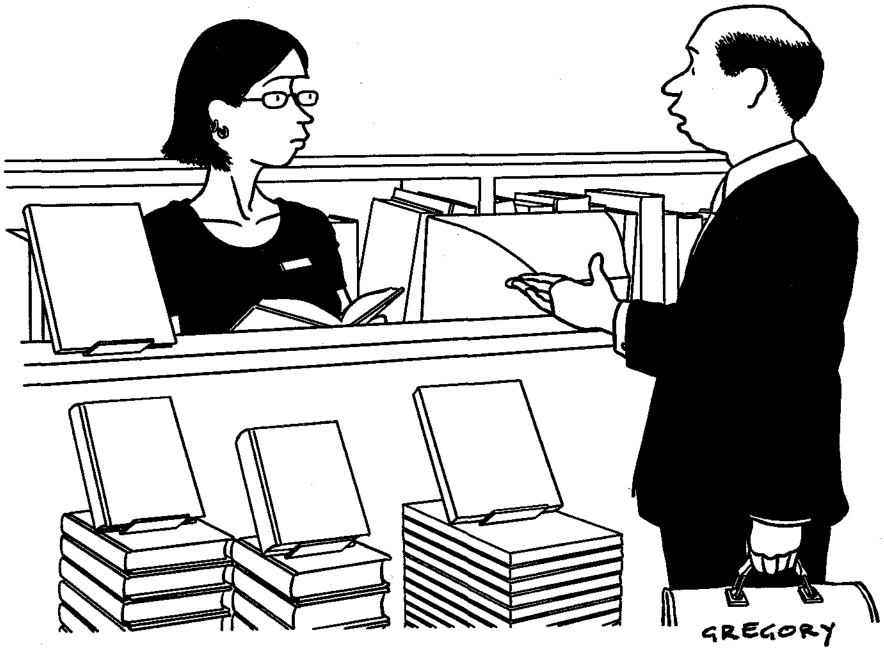
"I so wanted to have a bath in my room," Dame Judi said. "Mog, could you work that metal stopper thing in your tub?"

"No-o-o," Dame Maggie said. "No bath for me, either."

Dame Maggie looked at her wristwatch and said, "It's about midnight for us." She gave a restrained yawn. Dame Judi yawned, too. She said, "So little time. Mog, remember, we must shop."

"Oh, Jude, yes. That large store, Tiff-something. We laughed so much the last time we shopped."

"Yes, yes. Tiffany," Dame Judi said. "If they let us out, we must go back there." Dame Judi, who has deep-set, almond-shaped blue eyes and salt-and-pepper hair cut very short, wore a cream-colored pants suit; Dame Maggie, her eyes a lighter blue, her hair strawberry-blond, full, and thick, had on a black



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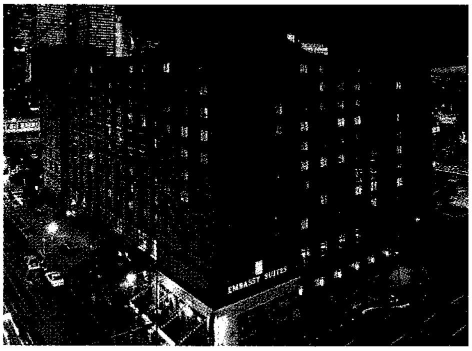

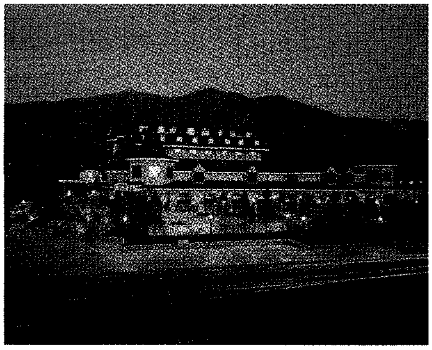

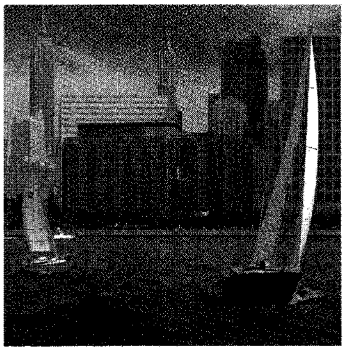

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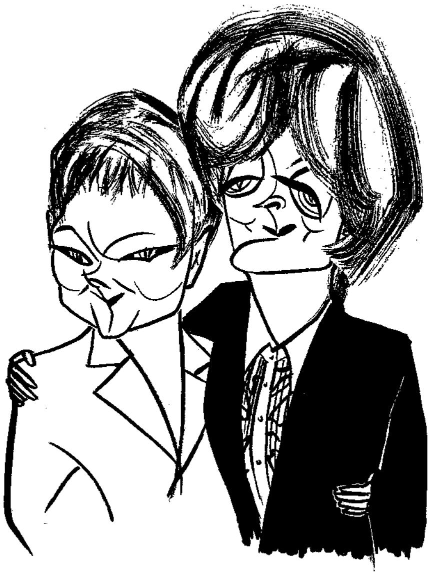
suit. The Dames, born a couple of weeks apart in 1934, met and became friends in 1958, when they were at the Old Vic. Both are Oscar winners. Both had husbands who died a few years ago. Both are a bit under five and a half feet tall.

They ordered and quickly demolished lobster salads and a bottle of white wine. Then a businesslike young P.R. man arrived and presented them with their schedules for the next two days.

"'8 A.M. Hair/Makeup,'" Dame Maggie read, then said, "I might just not go to bed . . ."

The start of the next morning had Dame Maggie giving an interview to *Time*, while Dame Judi travelled to ABC to do Regis and Kelly. Forty-minute drive to ABC. Dame Judi went on last, after Lucy Liu, who had ten minutes in which to talk about working for UNICEF, and several pairs of grade-school children ballroom dancing. During her nine minutes, Dame Judi sat, smiling and relaxed, and told Regis that she was cast as a snail at the age of five, but then wanted to be a stage designer, and changed her mind when she saw her older brother go in for acting. "No kidding!" Regis said exuberantly. Kelly asked, "Can you have anyone beheaded when you're a Dame?" The audience laughed and applauded. Regis then showed a clip from "Ladies in Lavender." He called Dame Judi a "great actress." That was that. Forty-minute drive back to the Ritz.



Judi Dench and Maggie Smith

Together again at the hotel, the Dames did a taped segment for the "Today" show (thirty minutes); a *Daily News* interview and photo session (forty-five minutes); lunch with a *Post* reporter (an hour); a Los Angeles *Times* photo shoot (fifteen minutes) and phone interview (forty-five minutes); and an A.A.R.P. radio interview (fifteen minutes). At 4:30 P.M., the Dames got into a car again and drove (half an hour) to midtown for an interview on NPR's "Weekend Edition." Thirty minutes later, they were back in the car. Upon arrival at the hotel, they did what the P.R. man called a meet and greet, in the lobby. By that point, they said, they were trying to figure out how they might vary their answers to repetitions of the same questions, most of which concerned their long friendship and whether it got in the way of their acting. They'd started out explaining that their relationship helped their acting.

"Then Jude went to just 'No,'" Dame Maggie said.

"We gave up," Dame Judi said. "Tomorrow, Mog, we shop."

The second morning was given over to "Japanese Distributor Interview Contacts," which meant talking, via an interpreter, to Japanese journalists.

"Their questions were very long and very detailed," Dame Judi said. "They got things all mixed up, but one of them was charming."

At 1:20 P.M., it was up to the Municipal Building, for "The Leonard Lopate Show," on WNYC (forty minutes). At 4 P.M., back at the hotel, they were photographed, after a long wait, for the Washington *Post*, posing back to back, then face to face. By 5:30 P.M., at the Bloomberg Building on Park Avenue, they were being greeted by Charlie Rose. He started laughing as soon as he saw them. "Can I say, 'Two Dames'?" he asked. He broke himself up, laughing. Later, he said, "I can tell this is a real friendship."

It was 7 P.M. En route in the car to CNN, on Columbus Circle, the Dames craned their necks to look for Tiffany's. The driver said it was further east. "Oh, down there's where Rumpelmayer's used to be. Rumpelmayer's is gone," Dame Maggie said sadly. "That lovely counter! It was so divine."

"Where is Barneys?" Dame Judi asked. "Oh, after CNN I suppose it will be too late to shop."

Dame Maggie slumped. "I'd like to turn into a cat right now!" she said. "Yeeeh-phph!" she spat, pretending to claw.

The P.R. man said that they would be on CNN's "Showbiz Tonight," live, following an interview with Lassie. At 7:40 P.M., the Dames went into the studio.

"You guys were perfectly cast as sisters," the CNN correspondent said. "How long have you guys known each other?"

—*Lillian Ross*

ON PROBATION SURE BEATS WORK

When Chris Stanton was a federal probation officer in the nineteen-seventies and eighties, he specialized in keeping an eye on organized-crime figures who had recently been released from prison. "In some ways, they were the easiest offenders to supervise," he recalled the other day. "They knew how to play the game. They did exactly what you asked them to do. If you said, 'Show up Tuesday at four,' they'd be outside your door at three-fifty-five. If you said, 'Bring in your tax returns,' they brought them in on time. But if you went to see them at their job they were never there. The challenge was that you knew they weren't." And then Stanton started to laugh. The supervisory life has grown more complicated since then. Stanton, who for the past dozen years has been the chief probation officer for the Southern District of New York, finds himself having to address a more metaphysical quandary: What, exactly, is work?

On April 19th, Martha Stewart attended a cocktail party and gala dinner, at the Time Warner Center, that was billed as a "celebration" of *Time's* "100 Most Influential People" issue. The evening seems to have been convivial, although Jon Stewart (no relation), who performed at the party, did note, after Martha's departure, that he had seen her "fashion a shiv out of a lamb shank." Her attendance raised certain questions, however, because, influential or not, she remains under home confinement after her conviction, last year, for, among other things, making false statements to fed-

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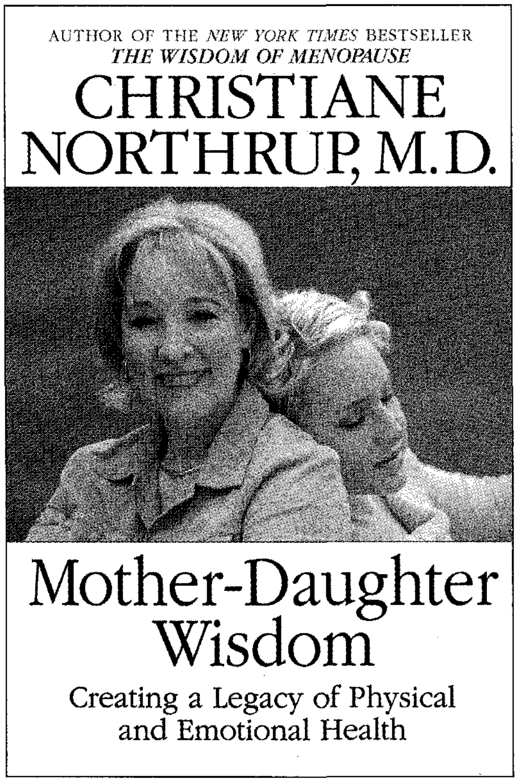

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eral prosecutors. The terms of Stewart's probation allow her to leave home for up to forty-eight hours a week for "employment," medical and dental appointments, food shopping, and religious observance. The question that Stanton's office is now investigating is whether the party constituted a genuine work obligation or mere socializing.

"No one really knows what a probation officer does," Stanton said, with cheerful irritation, in his office in the federal courthouse downtown. He is sixty years old, mostly bald, and has a bushy mustache, and when he's not on the street he wears a holster (empty) and a badge on his belt. "Sometimes you're a cop, sometimes a social worker," he said. "There's a fine balance. I may have one offender who screwed up one time, and he's trying to get a new direction in his life, and fifteen minutes later I may be with a guy who's a career criminal."

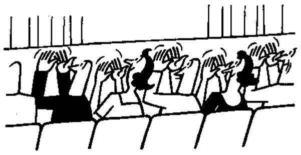
As for Martha Stewart, Stanton says that she'll get the same fair hearing that everyone else does. "The definition of employment is clear-cut in most cases," he said. "Most offenders go to an office or a factory or any place of business, and then at five o'clock they go home." Stewart's representative has said that her appearance at the dinner served as legitimate publicity for her company, Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia. "The probation officer has to determine whether it is essential employment," Stanton went on. "We're looking at the *Time*-magazine party. Is going to dinner parties work?" (It certainly can be, when it involves working a room, braving poached salmon, and smiling stiffly through "brief remarks.")

Stewart prepares a weekly schedule of activities for the approval of her probation officer, and the *Time* party was on the list, but Stanton is trying to determine whether she characterized it accurately. If Stewart is found to have violated the terms of her home confinement, the sanctions could range from a reprimand to tighter restrictions, or even, in an extreme case, a return to prison. Her home confinement ends in August.

"The job has changed tremendously in forty years," Stanton said. "We keep track of sex offenders with G.P.S. We have all sorts of electronic databases that tell us what people are doing." Only about forty offenders in the Southern District are, like Stewart, subject to home monitoring with an ankle bracelet. "Around this courthouse, the job of assistant U.S. attorney is a stepping stone. But when somebody becomes a probation officer, especially federal, it's considered top of the line. We're here for life."

—*Jeffrey Toobin*

DANCE DEPARTMENT LEAVING AILEY



Dudley Williams looks like something out of an eighteenth-century engraving—all line. His bald head is shaped like an egg; his feet taper to a point. His elegant, spidery hands are always in the air, talking. At sixty-six, Williams is, to his knowledge, the oldest dancer in any large touring company in the United States. But on May 8th, at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, in Newark, he will give his last performance with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre.

The other day, after a rehearsal, he sat down to talk about his career. "This is all a fluke," he said. As a boy, he and his friend Melvin would go see movie musicals and then reproduce the dance routines on roller skates. He intended to become a classical pianist, however, and his mother, who had bought him a spinet—an honored piece of furniture in their apartment, in Harlem's East River Projects—when he was ten, may have intended this even more. He contacted the High School of Performing Arts, and it turned out that the music department's application period was over, so he turned to the dance department, assuring his mother that he would transfer to music at the end of the semester. Then, when the semester ended, the head of the music department told him, first, that he was a very good dancer, and, second, that opportunities for black classical pianists were rare. "I ran upstairs, and I ran up to the dance teacher and said, 'O.K., let's go! Let's dance!' " His mother took it pretty well, he recalls.

After Performing Arts and a stint at Juilliard, he began dancing professionally, in the companies of Donald McKayle, Talley Beatty, Martha Graham, and, finally, Alvin Ailey, whose troupe he joined in 1964. He always told the people he worked for that he didn't want to do any partnering. This choice may have been partly practical—Williams weighs a hundred and thirty pounds—but he says it was a point of pride: "I don't want to carry anybody around the stage. I want to dance. I want it to be *me*." The refusal paid off, he believes. He got "special things," solos. To his fans, probably the most special thing he ever danced was the "I Want to Be Ready" section of "Revelations." In this number, set to a Negro spiritual about renouncing sin, a man in white struggles to rise from the floor. Williams's specialty is contained emotion, and that was perfect for this soul-testing dance.

"Revelations" is credited to Ailey, but "I Want to Be Ready" was actually choreographed by James Truitte, an Ailey dancer who, like his boss, had studied with the California dance guru Lester Horton. Williams says the whole dance is just a Horton class exercise: "It's a coccyx balance—laterals, hinges, laterals, hinges." In Truitte's hands, however, it became a dance. When he taught it to Williams, he told him how it was supposed to feel: "He said, 'When you start, it's like someone is on your shoulder, and pushes you back down. You try again, and you go a little higher, and they push you down. You try again, you go higher, and you break out.' "

Williams radiates calm onstage, but he says he is a very nervous performer: "I sweat in the palms of my hands—I wish the theatre would burn down." He sees this as part of the process. "Dancing is about acting, about being a liar, basically," he says. "Because often you don't feel like dancing, but it's your job. So you get out there and you do the movement, and it's not *happening*. So you work harder, you work harder, you go deep inside what you're about." And what started as an act becomes a reality.

Though Williams is leaving the Ailey company, he's not leaving dance. He is now working with Paradigm, a small troupe founded in 1998 by the choreographer Gus Solomons, Jr. Most of its members are in their sixties, but Williams says they have no big philosophy about the wisdom of the older dancer. They just want to keep performing.

—*Joan Acocella*

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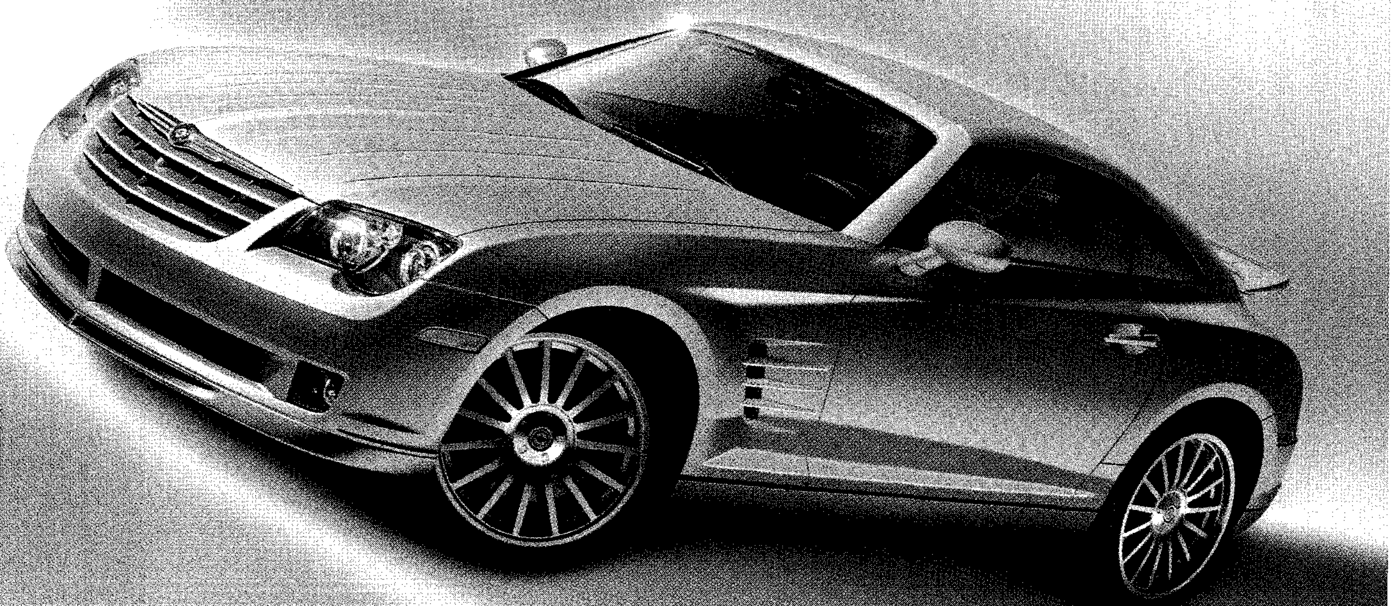

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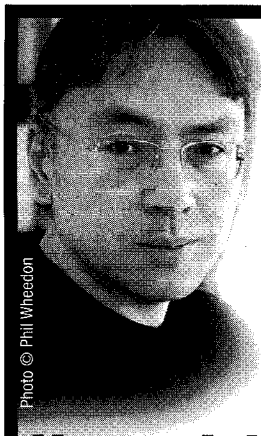
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LETTER FROM WASHINGTON

A LITTLE LEARNING

What Douglas Feith knew, and when he knew it.

BY JEFFREY GOLDBERG

Douglas J. Feith, who is the Under-Secretary of Defense for Policy, lives in one of the better Maryland suburbs, on a street of large and unhandsome Colonial homes. The interior of Feith's house has space and light, but it is furnished in a mostly expedient manner; Feith and his wife, Tatiana, have four children—ages eight to twenty-one—and the house feels very much theirs.

The exception is Feith's library. It is apparent that he has devoted considerable care and money to its design and, in particular, to its collection, which numbers at least five thousand volumes. The floors and shelves are dark oak, and the walls are covered in hunter-green wallpaper. The library is not in the style of the high-station Washington bureaucrat who wants to telegraph his indispensability; there are few photographs of Feith in the company of potentates and prime ministers and presidents. Instead, Feith has filled the room with images of figures who have earned his admiration. Busts of Washington and Lincoln sit on the shelves; Churchill scowls in the direction of Feith's desk. A black-and-white portrait of Theodore Herzl, the founder of Zionism, hangs over a green leather couch. In his collection, history has displaced nearly every other subject; fiction—his favorite is Nabokov—has been exiled to the basement. The library is weighted disproportionately to the history of the British Empire, and Feith has spent many hours schooling himself in the schemes and follies of the British on the playing fields of the Middle East.

History serves another purpose, Feith suggests: it provides solace to leaders who are misunderstood by their peers. "When history looks back," he told me, "I want to be in the class of people who did the right thing, the sensible thing, and not necessarily the fashionable thing, the thing that met the aesthetic of the moment."

Feith, who announced earlier this year that he will be leaving his post by this summer—he said he hopes to write a book about his experiences—has not often met the reigning aesthetic of Washington. It has been Feith's job, as the top policy adviser to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and his departing deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, to help build the intellectual framework for the Bush Administration's campaign against terrorism. His detractors see him as an ideologue who manipulated intelligence to bring about the invasion of Iraq. His main nemesis on Capitol Hill, Senator Carl Levin, a Michigan Democrat who serves on the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, told me that Feith deceived not only the White House but Congress as well. Yet the criticism of Feith in Washington goes beyond his ideology, to his competence. Even some fellow-neoconservatives, who have been lacerating in their criticism of Rumsfeld for his management of postwar Iraq, have asked whether Feith is better at reading history than at shaping it. "I don't know whether Feith deserves more praise for supporting George W. Bush's foreign policy or more criticism for being an agent of Rumsfeld," William Kristol, the editor of the *Weekly Standard*, said.

Fifteen hundred people report to Feith in the Pentagon, where he is known for the profligacy of his policy suggestions. Tommy Franks, who led the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, has been much quoted as calling Feith "the fucking stupidest guy on the face of the earth," apparently for ideas he proposed to Franks and his planners.

Franks's view is not universally shared by the military. Marine General Peter Pace, who has just been nominated to be chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, says of Feith, "Early on, he didn't realize that the way he presented his positions, the way he was being perceived, put him in a bit of a hole. But he changed his ways." Apparently, he became more consultative, particularly with his counterparts on the Joint Chiefs. Pace, who calls Feith a "true American patriot," said he did not understand Franks's attack. "This is not directed at any individual," Pace said, "but the less secure an individual is in his thought processes and in his own capacities, the more prone they were to be intimidated by Doug, because he's so smart." (A spokesman for Franks, Michael Hayes, said in an e-mail that the General would not comment for this article: "What do you think he has to gain by talking about Feith?")

Feith says that during the invasion Iraqis had "flowers in their minds."

STEVE BRODNER

Feith's most prominent defender is Rumsfeld, who told me that Feith is "one of the brightest people you or I will ever come across. He's diligent, very well read, and insightful." Rumsfeld explained Feith's trouble with Franks this way: "If you're a combatant commander and you're in the area of operations and you're hearing from people in Washington, what you're hearing is frequently not on point to what you're worrying about at the moment, just as the reverse is also true."

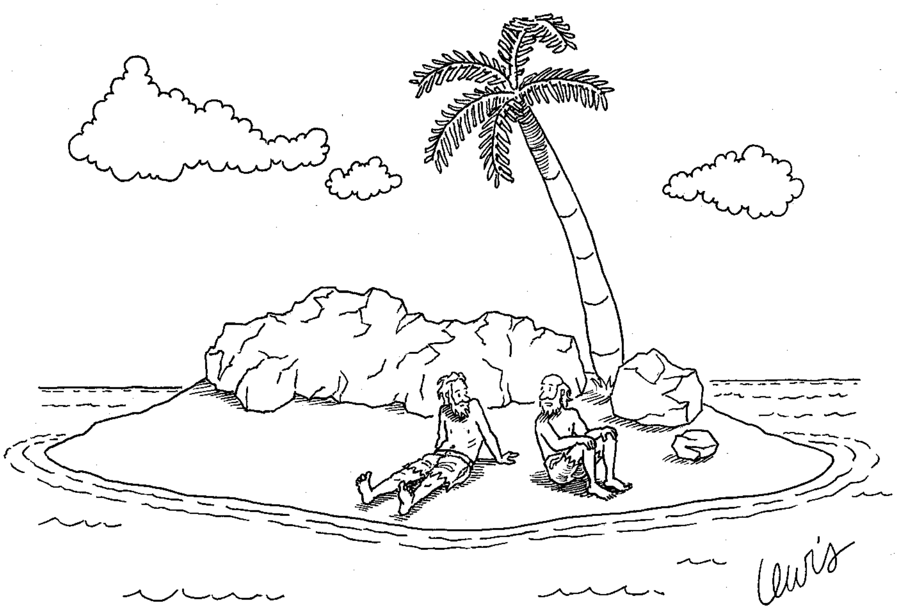
In conversation, Feith is not often on point. The first time we met, I was prepared to ask about his role in the management of postwar Iraq. Feith, though, preferred to discuss the influence on his thinking of Edmund Burke, the political philosopher who feared instability as much as neoconservatives seem to embrace it. I asked Feith to imagine what Burke would have thought about the Bush Administration's experiment in Iraq. "Burke warns in his writings about the danger of political abstractions put forward as universal principles," Feith said. Burke, he continued, "wrote brilliantly and bitterly about the French Revolution and the danger to a society of a bunch of people thinking they could remake society rationally and get rid of all the institutions that have grown up over centuries and reflect the distilled wisdom of numerous people." But the Bush Administration, Feith added, did nothing of the sort.

To draft Burke into the Bush Cabinet is typical of Feith: counterintuitive and clever, maybe too clever. He rejected the idea that Bush was seeking to remake Iraq in America's image: "I believe that what makes President Bush's policy of democracy promotion better, wiser, more careful than what one could describe as starry-eyed Wilsonianism is precisely the recognition that we should not be taking the particulars of our political views and our institutions and trying to impose them in places where there is not fertile soil." He also said that the idea of "Shiite democracy," a system in which clerics would play a large role, does not frighten him. "In different parts of the world, clerics play a larger or smaller role in the political process. The idea that there may be a country where clerics play a larger role in the political process than they do in America is not inherently antidemocratic or alarming," he said. "What the President talks about is that it is the nature of man to want to be free. I don't think that violates Burke's warnings."

Feith says that he is confident of the Administration's ultimate vindication in Iraq. But he is not indifferent to his current reputation, and during three long interviews and several telephone conversations he was indefatigable in his own defense. "I'm not going to be making some Oprah-like confessions," he told me at the start.

Feith is fifty-one, but his face is unlined; his hair is partly gray, but thick and moppish. His glasses magnify his eyes, making him appear owlish, and his mouth is set in an expression of bemusement that can slip into impatient condescension when he hears something that he thinks is foolish, which is often. He has the capacity, however, for self-deprecation. He told me that when Franks's characterization of his brainpower became public he jokingly suggested to his staff that he call a press conference to deny that he was in fact the "fucking stupidest guy" on earth.

Feith's first job in government came shortly after he graduated from Harvard, as an intern to a subcommittee chaired by Senator Henry (Scoop) Jackson, whose office was a locus of neoconservative thought. Apart from tours at the National Security Council and the Pentagon during the Reagan Administration (he was a top aide to the neoconservative Richard Perle, who was then an assistant sec-



"I'm just grateful we were able to turn our pants into shorts."

retary of defense), he has spent his professional life in the private practice of law—he received a law degree from Georgetown University—and as an insistent advocate of neoconservative causes.

One day, Feith showed me around his library. We started at the shelves devoted to Churchill and the lesser occupants of 10 Downing Street in the years before the Second World War. He pulled down a volume about Stanley Baldwin, who served as Britain's Prime Minister in the mid-nineteen-thirties. "Baldwin was considered the most successful politician of his day," Feith explained. "But the only people who have heard of him today see him as a jerk"—because, Feith explained, he dithered while Germany re-armed. Like Neville Chamberlain, he said, Baldwin did not understand the nature of the Nazi enemy.

Feith detoured through Disraeli—"He was attacked by many people, the way the neocons get attacked, because he had this fascinating idea that, as he put it, the workingman is a natural conservative"—and then became absorbed in Elie Kedourie's "In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth." He looked up long enough to ask, "You've read the McMahon-Hussein correspondence of 1916, haven't you?"

Kedourie set out to prove, through a close reading of letters between Sir Henry McMahon, the British high commissioner in Egypt, and Sharif Hussein, the leader of the Arab Revolt, that the Arabs led guilt-ridden British officials into granting the Sharif vast territory, including Palestine. But what interested Feith especially is the story, embedded in the episode, of an intelligence failure: "British intelligence was told that there were going to be whole units of the Ottoman military ready to defect if the British would only give support to the Hashemites. Well, the Arab units of the Ottoman military didn't defect." Feith smiled. In the Iraq war, it was hoped that the C.I.A. would bring Iraqi Army divisions to the American side, but that did not happen. Feith, like others in Rumsfeld's circle, is disparaging of the C.I.A.

Feith has been, for decades, a prolific writer of op-eds and articles. In the late nineteen-seventies, he wrote about America's energy supply, arguing, against conventional wisdom, that oil embargoes could be more damaging to the economies of Arab oil exporters than to the United States. In the nineteen-eighties, as a deputy to Perle, Feith focussed his attention—and skepticism—on arms control and détente. In the early nineteen-nineties, he predicted that the Oslo peace process between Israel and the Palestinians would fail.

His interests are eclectic, but they are tied together by a single theme: a mistrust of any policy that resembles appeasement—of OPEC, the Kremlin, Yasir Arafat, or states that sponsor terrorism. He derides the usefulness of treaties struck between democratic and authoritarian states. "If we had mutual trust and real security, you wouldn't need these agreements," Feith said, "and if you need these agreements, then it is an illusion to say that you have mutual trust and security." In the nineteen-eighties, the neoconservatives believed that the Soviet Union could be defeated, not merely contained. "The so-called realist school said that the Soviet Union would never collapse, and that efforts to make it collapse are running the risk of instability," Feith said. "The Reagan, neocon view was considered lunacy. I pride myself that I was on the right side of that debate. The intellectual class was on the wrong side." The intellectual class—a synonym, in Feith's mind, for the liberal élite—misunderstood the Oslo peace process as well, he said, for the same essential reason: the belief that the authoritarian Arafat could be appeased.

Feith formed his views as a teen-ager in the Philadelphia suburbs during the Vietnam War. "I had done a lot of reading, relative for a kid, about World War Two, and I thought about Chamberlain a lot," he told me. "Chamberlain wasn't popular in my house." Feith's father lost his parents, three brothers, and four sisters in German death camps. "What I was hearing from the antiwar movement, with which I had a fair amount of sympathy . . . were thoughts about how the world works, how war is not the answer. I mean, the idea that we could have peace no matter what anybody else in the world does didn't make sense to me. It's a solipsism. When I took all these nice-sounding ideas and compared it to my own little personal 'Cogito, ergo sum,' which was my understanding that my family got wiped out by Hitler, and that all this stuff about working things out—well, talking to Hitler to resolve the problem didn't make any sense to me. The kind of people who put bumper stickers on their car that declare that 'war is not the answer,' are they making a serious comment? What's the answer to Pearl Harbor? What's the answer to the Holocaust?" He continued, "The surprising thing is not that there are so many Jews who are neocons but that there are so many who are not.”

Feith’s library includes a large selection of books on Zionism, but he did not linger there. “I’m not looking to aggravate a distortion about me,” Feith said. The distortion, he said, is that his religion, or at least his longtime support for right-wing Israeli leaders, has affected his policy recommendations to Rumsfeld. Feith dismisses this criticism as a willful misunderstanding of his motives. “My interest in democratization predates the focus on the Middle East,” he says. Rumsfeld, for his part, derides the idea that the Administration was manipulated by its sub-Cabinet-level Jewish officials. “I suppose the implication of that is that the President and the Vice-President and myself and Colin Powell just fell off a turnip truck to take these jobs,” he said.

One afternoon, I asked Feith what had gone wrong in Iraq.

“Your assumption is that everything went wrong,” he replied.

I hadn’t said that, but I spoke of the loss of American lives—more than fifteen hundred soldiers, most of whom died after the declared end of major combat operations. This number, I said, strikes many people as a large and terrible loss.

“Based on what?” Feith asked. “It’s a large sacrifice. It’s a serious loss. It’s an absolute disaster for the families. Nobody can possibly deny how horrible the loss is for the families involved. But this was an operation to prevent the next, as it were, 9/11, the next major attack that could kill tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of Americans, and Iraq is a country of twenty-five million people and it was a major enterprise.”

Before the war, the Administration argued that the overthrow of the Baath regime would prevent a marriage of Al Qaeda terrorists to Saddam’s chemical and biological weapons. But after the fall of Saddam the United States and its coalition partners discovered that Saddam had apparently destroyed his stockpiles of unconventional weapons, and the Administration has been unable to prove a close operational relationship between Al Qaeda and the Iraqi regime.

I asked Feith if he would have recommended the invasion of Iraq if he knew then what he knows now.

“The main rationale was not based on intelligence,” Feith said. “It was known to anyone who read newspapers and knew history. Saddam had used nerve gas, he had invaded his neighbors more than once, he had attacked other neighbors, he was hostile to us, he supported numerous terrorist groups. It’s true that he didn’t have a link that we know of to 9/11. . . . But he did give safe haven to terrorists.”

Feith went on, “Given the ease, as everybody knows, with which one can reconstitute stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons if you have the capabilities which he had, I don’t think the rationale for the war hinged on the existence of stockpiles.” The postmortem reports of C.I.A. weapons inspectors confirm the view that Saddam remained interested in one day reconstituting his weapons-of-mass-destruction programs, Feith said, and went on, “There’s a certain revisionism in people looking back and identifying the main intelligence error”—the assumption of stockpiles—“and then saying that our entire policy was built on that error.” The case against Iraq, he argues today, was only partly about W.M.D.s.

One day, I asked Feith to describe the importance to him of Lincoln. He admires Lincoln, he said, for many reasons, but in particular for the stalwart way that Lincoln confronted evil. When I suggested that Feith might also admire Lincoln because Lincoln shifted the rationale for his war in the middle of the fighting, Feith replied, with enthusiasm, “I never thought of that. That’s right.”

His answer surprised me. I had expected him to say something like “The Bush Administration has not changed the rationale for the war.”

The next morning, Feith telephoned. He had evidently been thinking about his answer, because he had searched out a better one. He found it in an article by Nicholas Lemann, published in this magazine shortly before the beginning of the war, in which Feith was quoted as saying: “When you can think that if we do things right, and if we help the Iraqis, and if the Iraqis show an ability to create a humane representative government for themselves—will that have beneficial spillover effects on the politics of the whole region? The answer, I think, is yes.”

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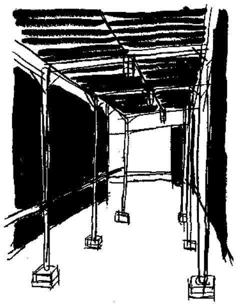
He read this to me and added, “I must say, I’m damn proud of that sentence. That was right on the nose.”

Feith, though, had left out part of what he told Lemann. “Would anybody be thinking about using military power in Iraq in order to do a political experiment in Iraq in the hope that it would have positive political spillover effects throughout the region?” he asked Lemann. “The answer is no.” He continued: “What we would be using military power for, if we have to, would be the goals the President has talked about, particularly the elimination of the chemical and biological weapons, and preventing Iraq from getting nuclear weapons.”

The largest controversy of Feith’s Pentagon career concerned his role in the lead-up to the war. Feith created two new units within his policy shop: the Office of Special Plans and the Policy Counterterrorism Evaluation Group. Special Plans was the name given to a new subregional office focussed on Iraq. The Ian Fleming-like label was chosen, Feith said, to obscure its mission; at the time, the Bush Administration was publicly pursuing a diplomatic solution to the Iraq crisis, and the Pentagon did not want to advertise that it was engaged in planning for postwar Iraq. The eighteen members of the Special Plans staff prepared strategies on a range of issues that America would face after an invasion: repairing Iraq’s economy and oil industry, the training of a new police force, war-crimes trials, the reorganization of the Iraqi government. The State Department, meanwhile, named its own planning program in a more straightforward way: its Future of Iraq project was also a study of problems anticipated in postwar Iraq. The two programs were not well coördinated; partisans of the State Department have accused the Pentagon of ignoring its planning effort. Feith told me he did not ignore the State Department effort, which he called "a bunch of concept papers."

The Policy Counterterrorism Evaluation Group was devoted to alternative intelligence analysis; it employed a rotating staff of two people who were asked to read intelligence data provided by the C.I.A. in order to find unexamined connections between state sponsors of terrorism and terrorist groups. Feith said, "I went to these two guys and said, 'Read the intelligence so you can tell me what I need to know about, so I can develop a strategy and policies for dealing with terror networks.'" Most of the work of this unit was soon focussed on looking for evidence of ties between Al Qaeda and Saddam. The analysts looked at data from old intelligence reports and concluded that the C.I.A. had overlooked or downplayed evidence of an operational relationship; they prepared a presentation for Feith.



Rumsfeld instructed Feith to offer the briefing to George Tenet, who was then the director of the C.I.A., and Feith's analysts made the presentation to C.I.A. officials in August of 2002. Several weeks later, the analysts made a more aggressive presentation to White House officials. They included the assertion that the leader of the September 11th hijackers, Mohamed Atta, met with an agent of Iraqi intelligence in Prague shortly before the attacks.

Feith's Democratic critics accused the counterterrorism group of providing the Administration with incorrect intelligence to buttress its case that Saddam and Al Qaeda were in league. "He was giving the Administration analysis that they wanted to hear," Senator Levin told me. "It was misleading, it was deceptive, it was based on feeble information." Feith's view is that the analysts were simply involved in alternative analysis—an idea that has become increasingly popular as Washington looks for ways to improve its ability to read intelligence.

Although the work of the Policy Counterterrorism Evaluation Group has been a preoccupation for many opponents of the Bush Administration, Feith's work in Special Plans had far more significance. In his library, I asked Feith what the Office of Special Plans planned. He began by disagreeing with the prevailing wisdom in Washington: that the crises of the past two years—the insurgency, the embitterment of Iraqis toward the United States, the civilian and military casualties—were in many cases preventable. He even disagreed with the notion that they were as serious as many Americans believe them to be.

Feith said, "The common refrain that the postwar has been a disaster is only true if you had completely unrealistic expectations." The thesis of Administration critics, Feith continued "is that we were a bunch of people intent on going to war with Iraq no matter what. September 11th was a pretext. We believed that it would be easy, that we were linked up to Chalabi"—Ahmed Chalabi, the leader of the pro-invasion Iraqi National Congress—"who was arguing that it would be easy and there would not be problems in the aftermath, and so for that reason nobody planned for anything hard, and when it turned out to be hard we were left without a plan." (Chalabi's chief sponsor in Washington has been Richard Perle, Feith's mentor. Chalabi's group told Senate staff members that it had passed intelligence to one of Feith's subordinates in Special Plans; the subordinate has denied it.)

Feith went on, "The Marshall Plan didn't get going until 1948. Here we are less than two years after the liberation of Baghdad, and an enormous amount of reconstruction has been done. If you say to me, 'Have errors been made in Iraq?,' I would say yes. Yes, I saw lots of things that I think I would have done—I saw lots of decisions made that I might have done differently. I would say there's not a single person in the United States government, probably including the President, who would not say the same thing."

When I asked Feith to describe some incorrect decisions, he said, "A lot of questions of that kind are going to take a little bit of distance and historical perspective to sort out."

Afghanistan, he said, is an object lesson in the dangers of premature judgment. He pulled out a packet of newspaper articles from late October, 2001, soon after American forces entered Afghanistan, and read from an October 28th column by Maureen Dowd in the *Times:* "The Northern Alliance was looking ever more feckless, even mocking the American air strikes to a reporter, saying the gazillion-dollar bombs had had no impact on Taliban troops, except to embolden them." She went on to suggest that a quagmire was in the offing. Feith put down the clippings and asked, "Where does she say, 'Oops, I guess I got it completely wrong'?"

There's a difference between Iraq and Afghanistan: it has been more than two years since the invasion of Iraq; Afghanistan was somewhat pacific a year after the overthrow of the Taliban. But Feith would not yield on that point. When I asked, for instance, if the Administration was too enamored of the idea that Iraqis would greet American troops with flowers, he argued that some Iraqis were still too intimidated by the remnants of Saddam's Baath Party to express their emotions openly. "But," Feith said, "they had flowers in their minds."

Feith said that the Pentagon carefully considered the possibility that the invasion and its aftermath could be disastrous. He mentioned what he called the "parade of horribles" memo, drafted by Rumsfeld in October, 2002, which listed all the things that could go wrong in the invasion. "Instead of saying, 'How can we conceal from the President those things that would make him reluctant?,' we decided we had to go to him before he makes such an important decision with a list of all those things that could possibly go wrong," Feith said.

Stephen Hadley, the national-security adviser, told me that Feith's office prepared the White House for the possibility of disaster: "We took seriously, and planned for, with the Department of Defense in the lead, a whole host of very chilling contingencies."

Feith said that one of those contingencies was the outbreak of looting. I asked him why, then, the military hadn't seemed more prepared. He replied that he had written a memo on this point, one month before the war, arguing that " 'we're going to have major law-and-order problems after the war.' " He went on to say, "We sent it to Central Command. We didn't send it through the Secretary. It wasn't a policy—just spotting problems. If you ask me, 'Did you anticipate problems or did you anticipate a rosy scenario?,' I'm telling you I wrote a memo anticipating problems." When I asked Feith if his memo's message was understood by Franks and his generals at CENTCOM, Feith shook his head and seemed to shrug.

A CENTCOM spokeswoman told me that it would be "inappropriate" to comment on communication between the Pentagon and Tommy Franks. In his autobiography, though, Franks wrote, "Rumsfeld never allowed Feith to interfere in my business. I was always thankful for that." General Pace said, "It's unfair to say that Doug was, quote, responsible, because the combatant commander"—Franks—"was responsible for drafting the plan."

Feith lost other battles as well. One was a plan to train five thousand Iraqi exiles to accompany American troops in the invasion. Feith and Perle, who supported the idea, claimed that CENTCOM subverted the plan. "Central Command saw the training of Iraqis as a pain in the ass," Perle said. "They take a jaundiced view of the locals." In the end, only seventy Iraqis were suitably trained before the invasion.

Feith did not argue that a force of Iraqi exiles would be a panacea, but he said that they could have aided in translating, in guiding, and in vetting local officials. He suggested that the problems in postwar Iraq multiplied in part because the good ideas emanating from his policy operation were ignored. "My inclination was to transfer more responsibility to Iraqis early. The strategic thought was liberation, not occupation. When people say, 'You screwed up the postwar plan,' what people don't understand is that we had all kinds of plans. But when Bremer"—Paul Bremer, who was appointed by President Bush to oversee the rebuilding of Iraq—"went over there, he was given autonomy over all kinds of plans that he didn't implement. The Secretary didn't want to use the five-thousand-mile screwdriver."

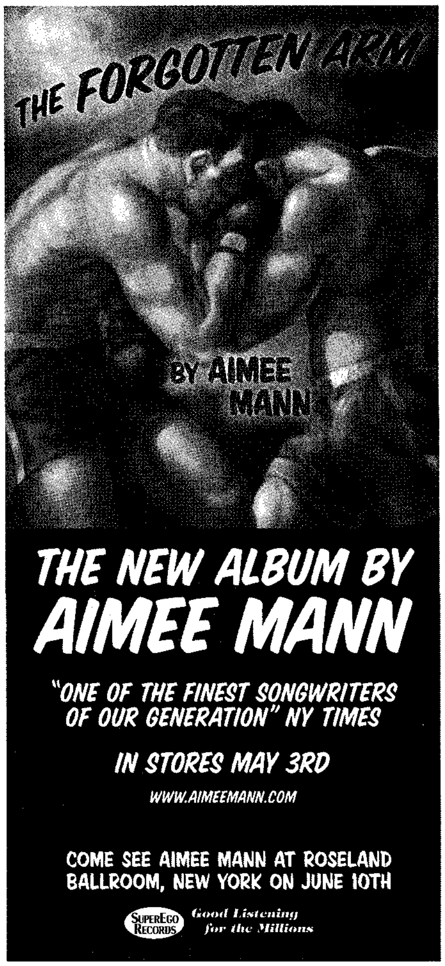
Several shelves in Feith's library are taken up by authors whose understanding of the world Feith, I was sure, found lacking. These were books by the great British Arabists, men such as T. E. Lawrence, John Bagot Glubb, and Harry St. John Philby. Neoconservatives, by reputation, have a certain nostalgia for the era of British imperialism, and I asked Feith what he learned from the English Arabists.

"There's a paradox I've never been able to work out," he said. "It helps to be deeply knowledgeable about an area—to know the people, to know the language, to know the history, the culture, the literature. But it is not a guarantee that you will have the right strategy or policy as a matter of statecraft for dealing with that area. You see, the great experts in certain areas sometimes get it fundamentally wrong."

I asked Feith if he was talking about himself, and he said, "I am talking about myself in the following sense: expertise is a very good thing, but it is not the same thing as sound judgment regarding strategy and policy. George W. Bush has more insight, because of his knowledge of human beings and his sense of history, about the motive force, the craving for freedom and participation in self-rule, than do many of the language experts and history experts and culture experts."

History may one day judge the removal of Saddam Hussein as the spark that set off a democratic revolution across the Muslim world. But if Iraq disintegrates historians will deal harshly with the President and his tacticians, the men most directly responsible for taking a noble idea—the defeat of a tyrant and the introduction of liberty—and letting it fail. Feith, like his superiors in the Pentagon and the White House, is not given to public doubt, but in our last conversation he seemed uncharacteristically humble. "When I was in Vienna," Feith said, "I went to the Ringstrasse, these enormous buildings, most of which were built twenty, twenty-five years before World War One. These buildings were built as the headquarters of a world empire, and they were built for the ages—enormous, imperially scaled buildings. They were built to last. But these people were absolutely on the verge of destruction of their empire, and they didn't see it. And that was a humbling experience.

"What I don't believe in, I suppose, is certainty." ♦



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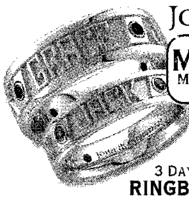

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

AUDIO TOUR

BY PATRICIA MARX

Hello, and welcome to the rent-stabilized apartment of Todd Niesle. I'm Debby, a specialist in Todd Niesle, and I'm going to be your guide. Before you begin your journey through the World of Todd Niesle and His Stuff, may I ask you to reduce the volume on your Acoustiguide player to a polite level? Todd Niesle does not know that you are here. Moreover, the woman in 12-A has had a bee in her bonnet about me ever since I, Debby, while, O.K., yes, a tiny bit drunk, mistook her door for Todd Niesle's late one night and jimmied it open. But that's another Acousti-story.

You are standing in Todd Niesle's foyer. The faux faux-marble table on your right is attributed to Todd Niesle's mother, circa last Christmas. It's a fine example of a piece that I, Debby, do not like. Take a moment to look through the mail on the faux faux-marble table. There should be a lot of it, because Todd Niesle is away, skiing in Vermont with his brother. Is there a letter postmarked Milwaukee? Just curious.

Proceed through the foyer and into the living room. In this room, we can see the influence of early Michelle. Notice how Michelle seems to like making bold statements with splashes of color, especially in upholstery. You can tell by the excess of passementerie on the throw pillows what an incorrigible bitch Michelle is. If you care to pause to look at some of the art and other knickknacks, simply press the red button on your Acoustiguide. We will continue at the medicine cabinet in the bathroom off the master bedroom.

To reach the master bedroom, you must traverse the cavernous room on your left. The sole function of that room is to provide a way to the next room. It doesn't seem fair that Todd Niesle pays only eleven hundred dollars a month for this spacious two-bedroom with a dining room, when I, Debby, happen to know that his income far exceeds the maximum allowed for a tenant in a rent-stabilized apartment. Furthermore, I, Debby, have heard Todd Niesle say on more than one occasion, "There's tons more closet space here than I know what to do with." And yet I, Debby, was never offered more than half a drawer, and even that humiliating amount I had to demand. The phone number for the Rent Info Hotline is 718-739-6400 (ask for Eligibility Violations).

Examine the objets in the master bedroom. Here is the famous jar of pennies and the original green shag rug from Todd Niesle's college days. Pay close attention to the black lace brassiere in the bottom drawer of Todd Niesle's bureau. The brassiere (36D) is not typical of the underwear of Todd Niesle. Or of mine (32B). You may be wondering what the brassiere is doing in this exhibit of the World of Todd Niesle and His Stuff. As Todd Niesle's quondam girlfriend, I, Debby, am wondering this, too.

Now we're in the bathroom. Actually, don't bother looking through the medicine cabinet. Todd Niesle must have taken all of the incriminating artifacts with him to Vermont.

Our next stop is the kitchen. Open the refrigerator. The carton of milk dates from the twelfth century A.D. See the Krups espresso maker? I, Debby, gave him that. It cost two hundred and forty-nine dollars, not including tax. You know what his gift to me, Debby, for my birthday was? A colander. You will observe that Todd Niesle's apartment has no gift shop. Correction: You are standing in the gift shop. Take the espresso maker.

As you help yourself to the professional-grade milk frother that I, Debby, also gave to Todd Niesle, be careful not to step on the creaky floorboard, as it will alert the neighbor downstairs, who also has it in for me. She's insane. Besides, I, Debby, wouldn't even know how to poison a dog.

We are now in the commodious coat closet in Todd Niesle's foyer. Our eyes are drawn immediately to the striking composition of the skis and the parka against the back wall. This is a stunning visual statement about a man who is on vacation, skiing with his brother, isn't it? Once again, Todd Niesle proves himself to be a master at creating a scenario that elicits powerful emotions, such as hatred and disgust.

After you have scrolled through the caller-I.D. log on the phone in the study, looking for Todd Niesle's brother's number to see if Todd Niesle really went to Vermont, place a prank call to Sue Ann Kraftsow. She lives in Milwaukee and she's in the book.

Please turn to your right. Just past the doorway, you'll see a framed photograph. The subject of this photograph has not been identified with certainty, but Todd Niesle scholars like me, Debby, believe that it depicts Sue Ann Kraftsow.

Now go back to the gift shop and get a knife from the drawer next to the sink. When you pry the backing from the picture frame, a photograph of me, Debby, will be revealed. In the art world, this is called "pentimento." In the real world, this is called failure to commit and to recognize undying love when you have the luck to get it.

Compare the two images. Can you discern from the vulgar contours of Sue Ann Kraftsow's face, the lifeless pallor, and the vague gaze that she is unworthy of even as base a miscreant as Todd Niesle? She's also fat. The second image, of me, Debby, on the other hand, shows a woman blessed with keen intelligence and generosity of spirit. It would be unscholarly of me, Debby, to point out the obvious aesthetic differences, but you, the viewer, can draw your own conclusions.

We have come to the end of our retrospective of the World of Todd Niesle and His Shit. You can return your Acoustiguide in the foyer. There is no charge for this tour, but, if you enjoyed yourself, call Todd Niesle and tell him so. His number is 212-399-4838 and he can be reached at 3 A.M. He likes pizza, ten pies at a time, and Rizzo's delivers. I, Debby, care not what you do with the key. ◆

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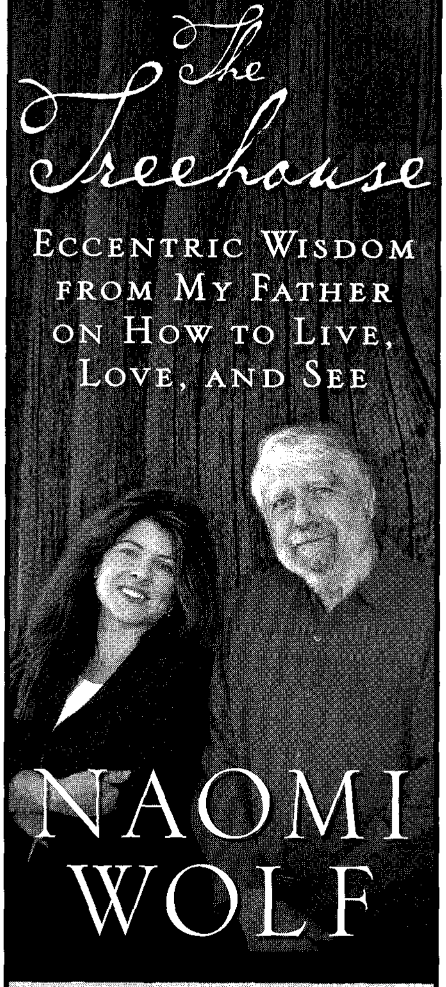
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LIFE AND LETTERS

THE DIARIST

How E. M. Delafield launched a genre.

BY CYNTHIA ZARIN

In September of 1925, the English novelist E. M. Delafield, who in private life was known as Mrs. Elizabeth Dashwood, was interviewed by the *Western Morning News*, Devon's leading newspaper. The occasion was her appointment, at the age of thirty-five, as the first woman magistrate on the local Cullompton Bench. When the questions turned from jurisprudence (Should women justices be required to attend hangings?) to women and fiction, she remarked, "As regards the difference between the male and the female point of view in novel writing, I don't think nowadays there is a great deal in it." The only distinction remaining, she added, was that too many women writers lacked a sense of humor. She did not admit that it was a lack she shared. Delafield began her career as one of the generation of female writers who appealed to a primarily female audience—the so-called "middlebrow" novelists—such as Rose Macaulay and Rosamund Lehmann. In her thirteen novels, she had taken as her main preoccupation the frantic efforts of young women, very much like herself, to free themselves from the fetid atmosphere of Edwardian home life. It wasn't until four years later that she found her métier, in the diaries of a Provincial Lady—a chronicle of the foibles, domestic and otherwise, of an ostensibly ordinary woman—and became one of the most trenchantly funny writers in England.

Delafield also spawned a genre. The most notable practitioner in this country was Shirley Jackson, whose deadpan columns in *Mademoiselle* and *Ladies' Home Journal*, in the nineteen-fifties, were later collected as "Life Among the Savages" and "Raising Demons"; in England, it was Alice Thomas Ellis, whose "Home Life" ran in *The Spectator* in the eighties. (Perhaps not coincidentally, Jackson and Thomas Ellis, like Delafield, also wrote horror stories.) Helen Fielding's "Bridget Jones' Diary" is the best-known example today, and it relies on many of the conventions that Delafield introduced. (Fielding, in turn, has made way for bloggers like the mystery writer Ayelet Waldman, who now writes a column on topics including her sexual attraction to her husband and her maternal anxieties.) But although the Provincial Lady frets about her overburdened schedule, inadequate wardrobe, and thwarted desires, what sets Delafield's work apart is that, as her column progressed, she widened her scope, concerning herself first with poverty and injustices in her own village and later with political turmoil and war, while almost never faltering from her darkly comic perch.

The diaries, which were collected in five volumes, made Delafield a best-selling author and a literary celebrity in England and the United States. The Provincial Lady's frequent contretemps with her bank manager and her sister-in-law, and her rarer conquests over her tongue and her temper, seemed to many readers an exact transcription of their own lives. That sense of recognition was not confined to Delafield's contemporaries. The British writer Jilly Cooper, in an introduction to a 1999 edition of the first volume, tells how, on first encountering the diaries, "a dying old lady in her eighties, a scruffy Putney journalist, and an ardent American feminist" found themselves identifying totally with the "dry-witted heroine." The diaries are all in print, and a new edition of the third volume, "The Provincial Lady in America," will be published next month (Academy Chicago; $16.95).

Delafield's transformation occurred in response to a request from Margaret Haig Thomas, Lady Rhondda, the editor of *Time and Tide*, a left-leaning feminist journal. *Time and Tide* supported the Labour Party, encouraged the election of women to Parliament, and demanded equal pay for equal work. (In 1923, Rebecca West wrote in its pages of "the desire felt by the mass of men that women in general should be subjected to every possible disadvantage.") Haig Thomas was equally interested in literature, and published, among other writers, Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, and George Orwell.

Delafield's idea for her column came after a luncheon for George Bernard Shaw.

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In early 1929, Haig Thomas wrote to Delafield, who was a *Time and Tide* contributor, to ask whether she might come up with a new light serial for the magazine. A few days later, Delafield went to London by train from Devon, where she lived with her husband, Major Paul Dashwood, and their children, Lionel, then eight, and Rosamund, five. (The journey then took five hours.) She had been invited to a luncheon given by *Time and Tide* for George Bernard Shaw, which she found trying. When she mentioned mutual acquaintances to an actor sitting next to her, he replied, casually, "That marriage, to my certain knowledge, has never been consummated." After a woman on her other side made an equally catty remark, Delafield decided to leave early: she had heard about a sale on bath sponges across town, and wanted to buy some before her train home. It occurred to her that while others had also left in haste, it was probably for more elevated reasons—to sit on a committee, to attend a concert. As she later wrote to Haig Thomas, "The idea had come into my mind of writing, in the first person singular, a perfectly straightforward account of the many disconcerting facets presented by everyday life to the average woman. . . . The title of *Diary of a Provincial Lady* presented itself at once, and I wrote the first installment—a very short one—soon after I got home. I wrote it in the intervals of planting hyacinth bulbs in bowls, and as every other woman of my acquaintance was, or had been doing, exactly the same thing at that particular time of year for almost as many years as I could remember, it seemed fairly probable that indoor bulbs played a part in the lives of most provincial ladies. So I made them the *motif* of the first installment":

> November 7th: Plant indoor the indoor bulbs. Just as I am in the middle of them, Lady Boxe calls. I say, untruthfully, how nice to see her. . . . Do I know, she asks, how very late it is for indoor bulbs? . . . Lady B. enquires after the children. . . . Do I realize . . . that the Cold Habit is entirely unnecessary, and can be avoided by giving the child a nasal douche of salt-and-water every morning before breakfast? Think of several tart and witty rejoinders to this, but unfortunately not until Lady B.'s Bentley has taken her away.

She sent the piece to Haig Thomas, saying that if it was terrible she should throw it in the wastebasket. Instead, the column ran weekly, in *Time and Tide* and, later, in *Punch*, for ten years. Paul Dashwood became the prototype for the phlegmatic Robert; Lionel was the model, loosely, for the introspective Robin; and Rosamund became Vicky, who was prone to temper tantrums. Lady Adams, of nearby Bradfield Hall, for whom Paul Dashwood worked as land agent, was lambasted as the overbearing Lady Boxe. Some of the figures in the diary are fictional: Old Mrs. Blenkinsop, who balks at her daughter's marrying; Cissie Crabbe, a demanding long-lost school friend; and Our Vicar's Wife. But the figure who is most roundly mocked is the Provincial Lady herself, who is a broad self-portrait. Like Delafield, she is a contributor to *Time and Tide*, but while Delafield turned out a book a year, the Provincial Lady suffers from writer's block; in 1942, a visiting journalist found Delafield to be "an entirely soigné person," but the Provincial Lady's clothes are held together with safety pins.

In the first installments, many of the conventions of the diary are already in evidence: the internal question ("Query: Does Robert, perhaps, take in what I say even when he makes no reply?"); the internal memorandum ("*Mem*: See whether tennis coat could be dyed and transformed into evening cloak"); the children ("Query: Does motherhood lead to cynicism?"); the entirely natural string of thoughts which when recorded becomes surreal ("Lady B. stays to tea. . . . We talk some more about bulbs, the Dutch School of Painting, Our Vicar's Wife, sciatica, and *All Quiet on the Western Front*"). Characteristic, too, are the rapier deflations: "Realize—not for the first time—that intelligent women can perhaps best perform their duty towards their own sex by devastating process of telling them the truth about themselves. At the same time, cannot feel that I shall really enjoy hearing it."

The facts of the Provincial Lady's early life are not disclosed in the diaries, but E. M. Delafield was born Edmée Elizabeth Monica de la Pasture on June 9, 1890, in East Sussex. She was the elder daughter of Count Henry de la Pasture, the fifth child of the Marquis de la Pasture, whose ancestors had fled the French Revolution, and Elizabeth Lydia Rosabelle Bonham, called Betty, whose grandfather had been the British consul-general to Naples. Both families were Catholic. Edmée's sister, Yolande, was born in 1892. Edmée was a pretty child, dark-haired, graceful, and fine-boned. According to Violet Powell, who wrote the only biography of Delafield—"The Life of a Provincial Lady" (1988)—Edmée was favored by her mother, and her sense that Yolande was treated unjustly was to remain with her. To augment the family's income, Betty became a prolific writer of popular novels and plays, one of which was staged for Edward VII. To her daughters, Elizabeth de la Pasture was demanding and capricious. Delafield, in a brief memoir of her early life, wrote, "I was the victim of an emotionally loving, terribly possessive parent who had, in all probability, not the slightest idea of the terrific opposition that she was continually putting up against my natural development, in her unconscious determination that I should grow up to be nothing but an extension of her own personality."

Starting when Edmée was ten, her mother enrolled and then removed her from a rapid succession of schools. When their school days came to an end, Edmée and Yolande entered the life of superannuated idleness then common to girls of the upper classes. In the last volume of the diaries, the Provincial Lady and her friend Felicity Fairmead, shopping at Harrods during the war, recall long-ago days:

> Felicity reminds me that she was never, in early youth, allowed to travel by herself, that she shared a lady's-maid with her sister, that she was never taught cooking, and never mended her own clothes.
>
> Inform her in return that my mother's maid always used to do my hair for me . . . and that I had no idea how to make a bed or boil an egg until long after my twenty-first year.
>
> We look at one another in the deepest dismay at these revelations of our past incompetence, and I say that it's no wonder the world is in the mess it's in to-day.

The Count died in 1908, and two years later Betty married Sir Hugh Clifford, the governor-general of the African Gold Coast. (Clifford was a friend of Joseph Conrad, who drew on Clifford's experiences for his novels; he was also an inspiration for Noël Coward's "Mad Dogs and Englishmen.") Edmée and Yolande learned about their mother's marriage after the fact. Edmée later recalled that for a girl to remain single past the age of twenty was "something between a minor tragedy and a major disgrace." Rather than face humiliation, shortly after her twenty-first birthday she entered a cloistered French convent in Belgium. (She remarked that it was a credit to the Church that only one order even considered accepting her.) Penance for infractions included wearing a barbed-wire arm bracelet. She lasted eighteen months and lost forty pounds.

When the First World War started, Edmée began working at the Exeter Voluntary Aid Hospital. She was left with next to no time on her hands, a condition that she found suited her better than leisure, and she began to write her first novel, four years after her mother wrote her last one. (At Yolande's suggestion, she took the pseudonym E. M. Delafield, a play on her own name, to escape comparison with Betty.) "Zella Sees Herself," published in 1917, is about a dreamy girl who discovers that a degree of realism is advisable for conducting domestic affairs. The book almost immediately went into a second printing, and three more novels quickly followed. In the spring of 1919,

RAPTURE

It is just as they knew it would be:
the proof
of their rightness spread around them
like grass or sidewalks

among the bland custardy palaces
and picnic tables
of their reward. The air
smells of children and coconuts. Truth
blares from every station on the dial.

Do they miss dogs, the black
squelch of November, bittersweet
wringing its red hands?
Are they saddened

to meet an old love without pain
in the gilded silent grove
that lately, come to think of it,
has been looking rather dusty,
and where less and less often they feel someone watching?

The angels are kind, like waiters, but not very talkative.

No wonder they gather, like exiles
straining toward faint reports
crackling up from below—
war, disaster, stars plunging into the sea.

God, it appears, is elsewhere, even here.

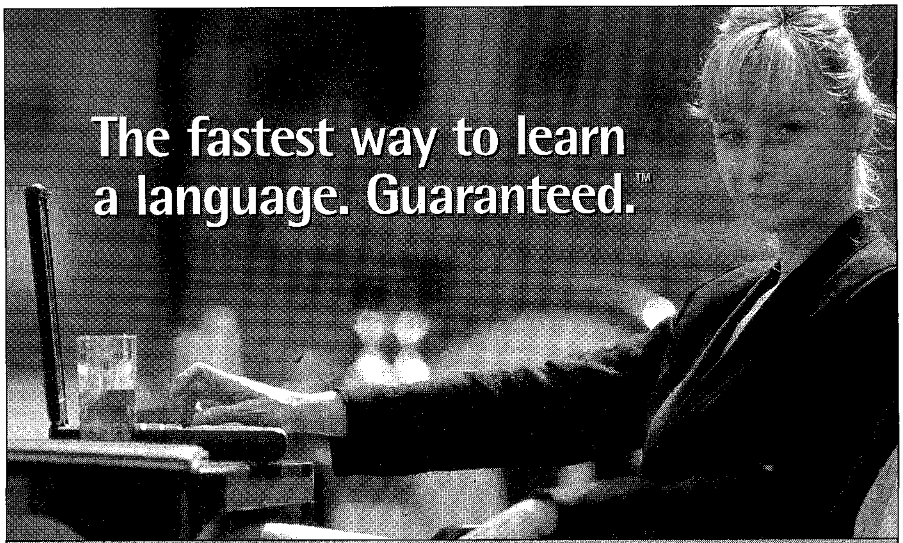
—*Katha Pollitt*

Edmée met Major Paul Dashwood, a younger son of Sir George and Lady Dashwood, when he was commandeered by Betty to carry her bags off a train at Waterloo Station. Edmée, then almost twenty-nine, was waiting on the platform. They married in July.

The Dashwoods moved first to Singapore, then to Kuala Lumpur, where Paul resumed his work as a civil engineer. Edmée, despite the change of house and climate and a pregnancy (with Lionel), wrote three more novels, which, because she loathed colonial life, were resolutely set in England. In 1922, the Dashwoods returned home and settled in Croyle House, near the village of Kentisbeare, in Devon. Rosamund was born soon after. Paul, like Edmée's father, had no guaranteed income, so Edmée (now known as Elizabeth to all but her family) planned to help support the family with her writing, as her mother had.

It takes about eight minutes to walk the length of Kentisbeare. Most of the houses on the High Street are made of cob, and many have thatched roofs. A good number of them have stood, attached one to another, for more than five hundred years. From the center of the village, a secondary road heads north and, a mile on, passes Croyle House, a large white Georgian building surrounded by flower gardens and bordered by what was once the Dashwoods' tennis lawn. Elizabeth Dashwood often walked into the village to mail her own and E. M. Delafield's letters. Sometimes she rode her bicycle. She took to village life, and it is her activities that surface in the diary.

By 1923, she had become a contributor to *Time and Tide*. The next year, the Women's Institute movement, whose priority was the education of rural women, reached Devon. At the first meeting, Delafield was unanimously elected president of the Kentisbeare chapter. The group, which included almost all the women in the village, met monthly, and often put on elaborate skits and performances. There were visiting speakers, and Delafield often pinch-hit: "Oct. 2nd . . . I launch out on A Visit to Switzerland." Addie Milton, who lived on the High Street and worked occasionally as the Dashwoods' cook, also belonged to the Women's Institute. Her membership card from that period notes that no "subject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likely to lead to serious controversy or friction shall be brought forward for discussion at an Institute meeting," yet friction was often unavoidable. When Delafield was asked to take on adjudication more formally and become a justice of the peace, she particularly concerned herself with how the law affected the social conditions of working-class women and children. Her political sympathies sometimes made social intercourse trying for the Provincial Lady, who shares her views:

> March 14th . . . Later on talk about politicians. Mr. White . . . adds that Baldwin is a thoroughly *honest* man, and that Ramsay MacDonald is *weak*. Mrs. White supports him with an irrelevant statement to the effect that the Labour Party must be hand in glove with Russia, otherwise how would the Bolshevists dare to go on like that?
>
> She also suddenly adds that Prohibition and the Jews and Everything are really the thin end of the wedge, don't I think so? I say, Yes, I do, as the quickest way of ending the conversation, and ask if she plays the piano, to which she says No, but the Ukelele a little bit.

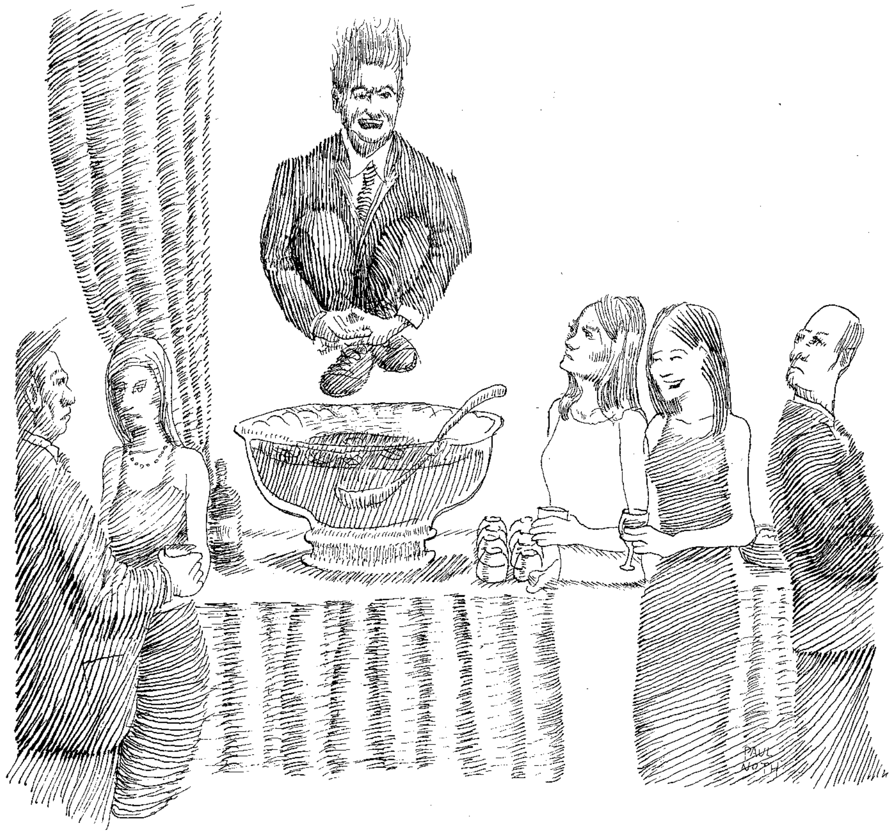
In the years of the diaries, Delafield published seven novels and a collection of short stories, and wrote three plays, including "To See Ourselves," which featured a family much like the Provincial Lady's and ran at London's Ambassadors Theatre. (A review in *Theatre World* called it "an occasion for connoisseurs of light comedy.") In 1933, after the success of the first two volumes of the diary—"The Diary of a Provincial Lady" (1930) and "The Provincial Lady Goes Further" (1932), in which she sublets a flat in London—Delafield was invited on a book tour in America. She wrote dispatches, which were serialized in *Punch* (and collected in 1934, in the third volume of the diaries), on a portable typewriter propped on her knees in a hotel room. She admires Niagara Falls, department stores, the coffee, and Harlem night life. She insists on a visit to the Alcott House, in Concord, Massachusetts (which Alexander Woollcott arranged for her), and she sets down a description of a New England winter afternoon which is as indelible as a woodcut.

In 1935, she succumbed, with trepidation, to the urging of her American publisher, Cass Canfield, of Harper's, who told her, she wrote, "I wish to heavens you'd go and live on a Collective Farm in Russia for six months, and write a funny book about it." Assured that such a trip was impossible, she nevertheless managed to be accepted as a guest at the Seattle Commune, seven hours from Rostov-on-Don. With her ingrained sense of fair play, she did not bring any extra provisions, and found that she could survive chiefly on black bread. She was given work in the bakery, and befriended Eva, the commune nurse, who tried to grow hyacinths in a dirt patch. She promised to send her bulbs.

In Leningrad, Delafield toured the Winter Palace. ("It's just grand," Mrs. Pansy Baker, a fellow-tourist whom she comes to despise, says, "to think of all those splendid workers forcing their way in, and destroying all that wicked luxury!") The diary, which Delafield smuggled out of Russia under her coat, is a scrapbook of almost photographic images: a bas-relief over a Moscow doorway of the English lion and unicorn from which the crown has been laboriously chipped away ("the Soviet is certainly very *thorough*"), fir trees along the wall of the Kremlin, hotel fleas. Shown the Alexander Palace, she lingers in the tsarina's room, and an elderly caretaker wordlessly hands her a framed photograph of the tsarevitch. She finds Russia repressive, unsanitary, primitive, and unnerving, but she does manage to be funny: receiving a note from Canfield asking whether household pets exist in the new Russia, she remarks, "I think that, if I chose to make it mine, I can have this field of enquiry all to myself," but concludes that it would not endear her to Intourist, which already regards her with suspicion. In Moscow, she remembers to send postcards to her cook's young son, Dick Milton, for his stamp collection. Sometimes she sends two, writing, "In case you didn't get my first post-card I am sending this one, of the Tomb of Lenin."

Although the resulting book, "Straw Without Bricks: I Visit the Soviets," was not originally intended as part of the series, it was later reprinted as "The Provincial Lady in Russia"; the tone varies only slightly, and the line between Elizabeth Dashwood (she is referred to in Russia as Comrade Dashwood) and the Provincial Lady is thin. Malcolm Muggeridge, reviewing the book in *Time and Tide*, described it as "sincere, witty, and indomitable." When it was published here, the *Times* reviewer said that it was "informing and brilliantly written but also highly amusing."

By the mid-thirties, the diaries were being imitated; Dorothy L. Sayers used the Provincial Lady's formula, complete with queries and memoranda, for the diary kept by Lord Peter Wimsey's mother in "Busman's Honeymoon." In 1935, Virginia Woolf wrote to her niece, Angelica Bell, "I've been seeing E. M. Delafield who writes The Provincial Lady: she is called Dashwood really; Elizabeth Dashwood; and lives in an old house like a character in Jane Austen; whom she adores. But she has to scribble and scribble to pay for it and her children." The Woolfs' Hogarth Press published Delafield's two books of criticism: "The Brontës, Their Lives Recorded by Their Contemporaries" and "Ladies and Gentlemen in Victorian Fiction."



"Didn't I tell you Tom was fun?"

• •

While Delafield's private obsessions—the skewering of romantic fantasy, the oppressive force of personality—dominate her novels, they are made light of in the diaries by the Provincial Lady's bracing ability to rise above them, which turns the diaries themselves from natter into comedy. In that high ether, however, worries gather like small clouds. Delafield had little confidence in herself as a mother, noting in the diaries, "A mother's influence, if any, almost always entirely disastrous." While Paul Dashwood does not seem to have balked at his portrayal as Robert—contemporaries remember his enjoying "To See Ourselves" at the Ambassadors—Delafield must have realized that the diaries might present difficulties for her children as they grew older; those caricatures, especially of Lionel, become gentler as the diaries progress. We learn that Robin is not particularly good at games—Dick Milton remembers that Lionel's lack of interest in sport disappointed his father. (A skittish secondary character in the diaries, called the Boy, who falls ill and misses a term at school, may also be a version of Lionel.) Vicky, by contrast, is as strong as the sun; later in life, Rosamund, who wrote a book called "Provincial Daughter," which she cheerfully admitted is a pale imitation, moved to Canada and became a competitive runner.

"The Provincial Lady in Wartime" (1940) was the last volume of the diaries. In it, the Provincial Lady meets chatty Mrs. Pankerton in the village, who says to her that "one of the very first things she thought of, when war broke out, was me. Now, she said to herself, that unfortunate woman . . . can stop frittering her time and talents away, and Find Herself at last." The Provincial Lady makes room in her house for evacuated children, and goes to London, desperate to make herself useful in the war effort (she ends up making sandwiches in an Underground station). Then, on November 4, 1940, Lionel Dashwood, who had enlisted in the Shropshire Guard, died in what was described, at an inquest, as an unexplained accident in a gun room. Delafield, however, wrote to a friend that she had known for a long time that life was not easy for Lionel. She sent a note to Addie Milton to ask if Dick, who was also in the Army, could get leave to be a pallbearer at the funeral. Written across the top of the page, as if she had taken the letter back out of the envelope before mailing it, was "If Dick comes it must not be an expense to him or to you. You will let me know, won't you?"

During the next two years, Delafield worked for the Ministry of War Information. Paul organized the Devon Air Raid Precautions. In 1943, Delafield felt unwell and went up to London for medical treatment. She died six months later, apparently of cancer, in Kentisbeare, at the age of fifty-three. Reflecting on her readers' identification with the Provincial Lady, Delafield wrote that it is "a startling and salutary thought that most of us are so very much alike that we all recognize one another at sight." The most subversive fact about Delafield is that, despite her class and circumstances, she really believed this to be true. Ivy Blackmore, who has lived her whole life in Kentisbeare, joined the Women's Institute in 1928, when she was fourteen, and her best friend, Florence, was once the parlormaid at Croyle House. "Mrs. Dashwood was keen on writing," Blackmore told me, "but you could talk to her about anything." ♦

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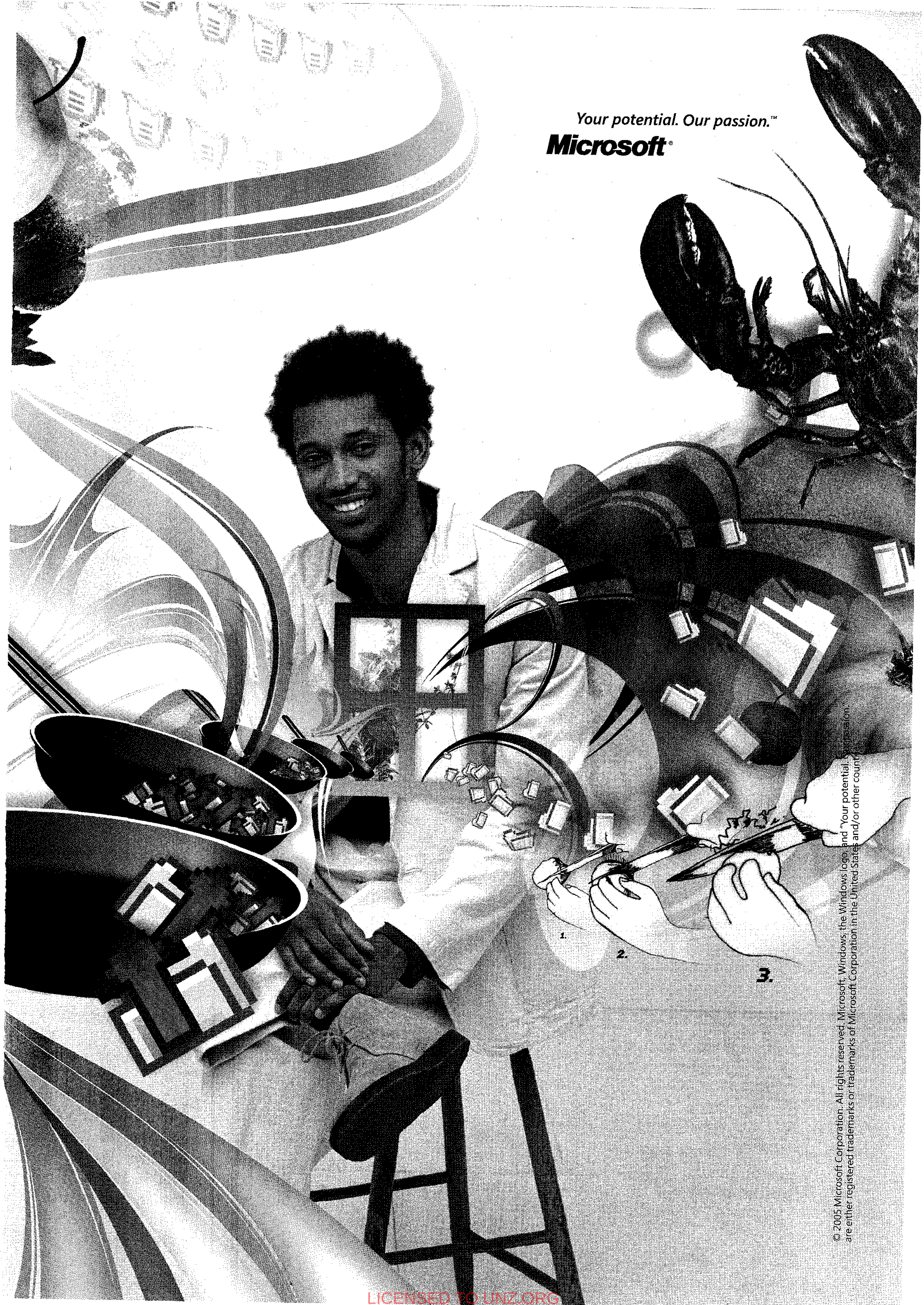
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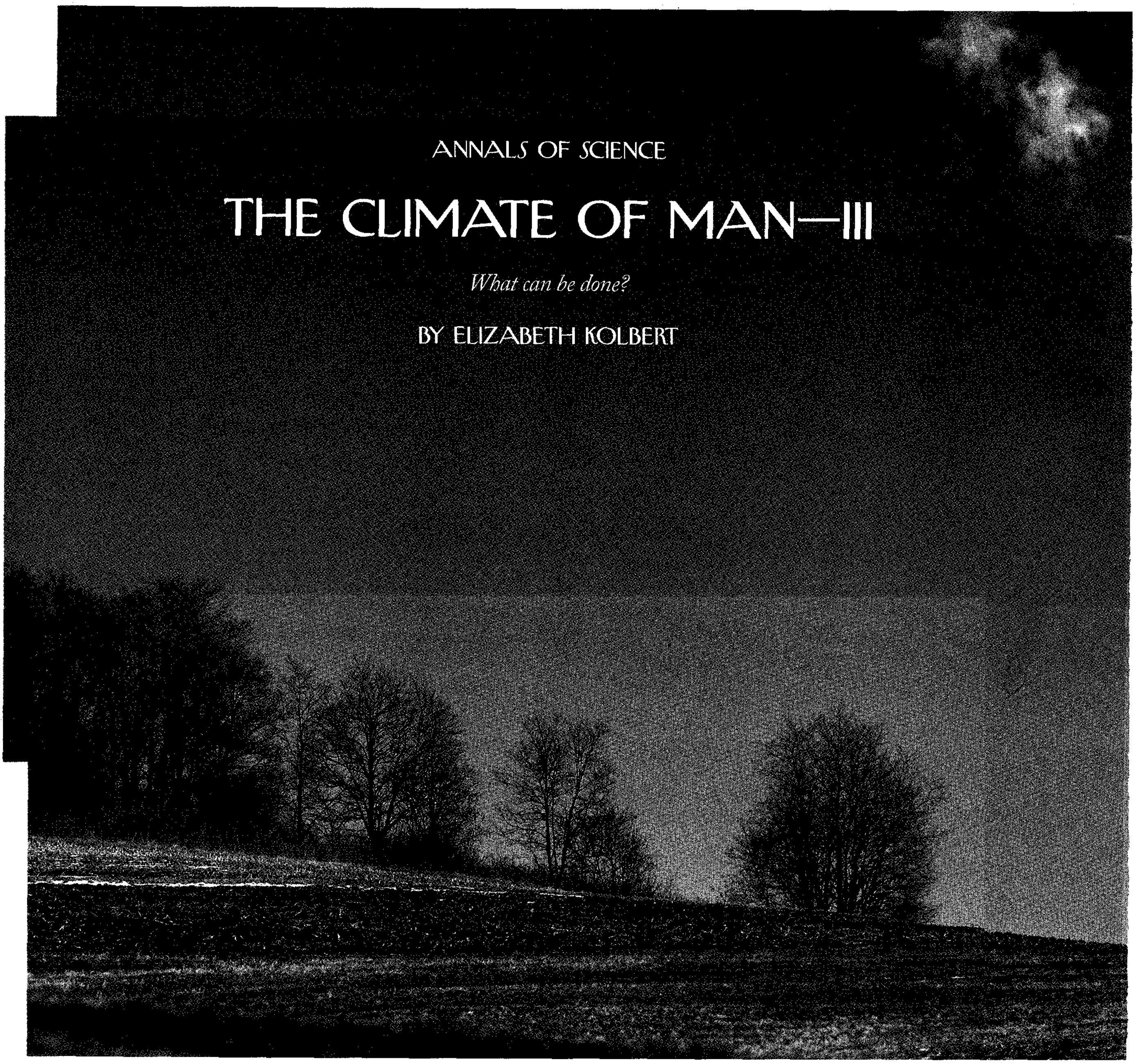
ANNALS OF SCIENCE

THE CLIMATE OF MAN—III

What can be done?

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT



In February, 2003, a series of ads on the theme of inundation began appearing on Dutch TV. The ads were sponsored by the Netherlands' Ministry of Transport, Public Works, and Water Management, and they featured a celebrity weatherman named Peter Timofeeff. In one commercial, Timofeeff, who looks a bit like Albert Brooks and a bit like Gene Shalit, sat relaxing on the shore in a folding chair. "Sea level is rising," he announced, as waves started creeping up the beach. He continued to sit and talk even as a boy who had been building a sandcastle abandoned it in panic. At the end of the ad, Timofeeff, still seated, was immersed in water up to his waist.

In another commercial, Timofeeff was shown wearing a business suit and standing by a bathtub. "These are our rivers," he explained, climbing into the tub and turning on the shower full blast. "The climate is changing. It will rain more often, and more heavily." Water filled the tub and spilled over the sides. It dripped through the floorboards, onto the head of his screeching wife, below. "We should give the water more space and widen the rivers," he advised, reaching for a towel.

Both the beach-chair and the shower ads were part of a public-service campaign that also included radio spots, newspaper announcements, and free tote bags. Notwithstanding their comic tone—other commercials showed Timofeeff trying to start a motorboat in a cow pasture and digging a duck pond in his back yard—their message was sombre.

A quarter of the Netherlands lies below sea level, much of it on land wrested from either the North Sea or the Rhine or the River Meuse. Another quarter, while slightly higher, is still low enough that, in the natural

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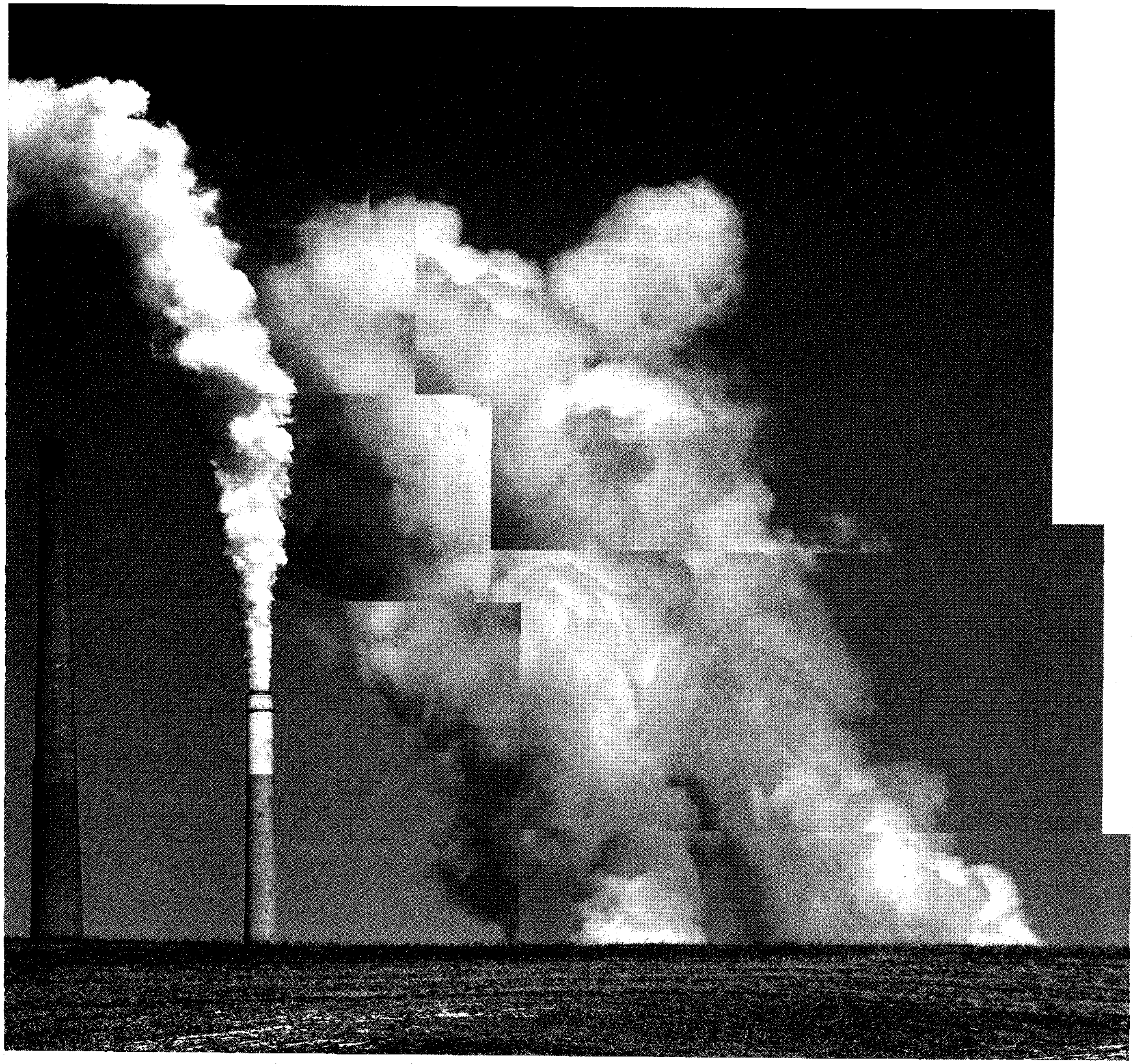


course of events, it would regularly be flooded. What makes the country habitable is the world's most sophisticated water-management system, which comprises more than ten thousand miles of dikes, dams, weirs, flood barriers, and artificial dunes, not to mention countless pumps, holding ponds, and windmills. (People in Holland like to joke, "God made the world, but the Dutch made the Netherlands.")

Until recently, it was assumed that any threat to low-lying areas would be dealt with the same way such threats always had been: by raising the dikes, or by adding new ones. (The latest addition, the Maeslant barrier, which is supposed to protect Rotterdam from storm surges with the aid of two movable arms, each the size of a skyscraper, was completed in 1997.) But this is no longer the case. The very engineers who perfected the system have become convinced that it is unsustainable. After centuries of successfully manipulating nature, the Dutch, the ads warn, will have to switch course.

Eelke Turkstra runs a water-ministry program called Room for the River, which is just the sort of enterprise that Timofeeff was advocating when he climbed into the bathtub. A few months ago, I arranged to speak with Turkstra, and he suggested that we meet at a nature center along a branch of the Rhine known as the Nieuwe Merwede. The center featured an exhibit about the effects of climate change. One kid-friendly display allowed visitors to turn a crank and, in effect, drown the countryside. By 2100, the display showed, the Nieuwe Merwede could be running several feet above the local dikes.

From the nature center, Turkstra took me by car ferry across the river. On the other side, we drove through an area that

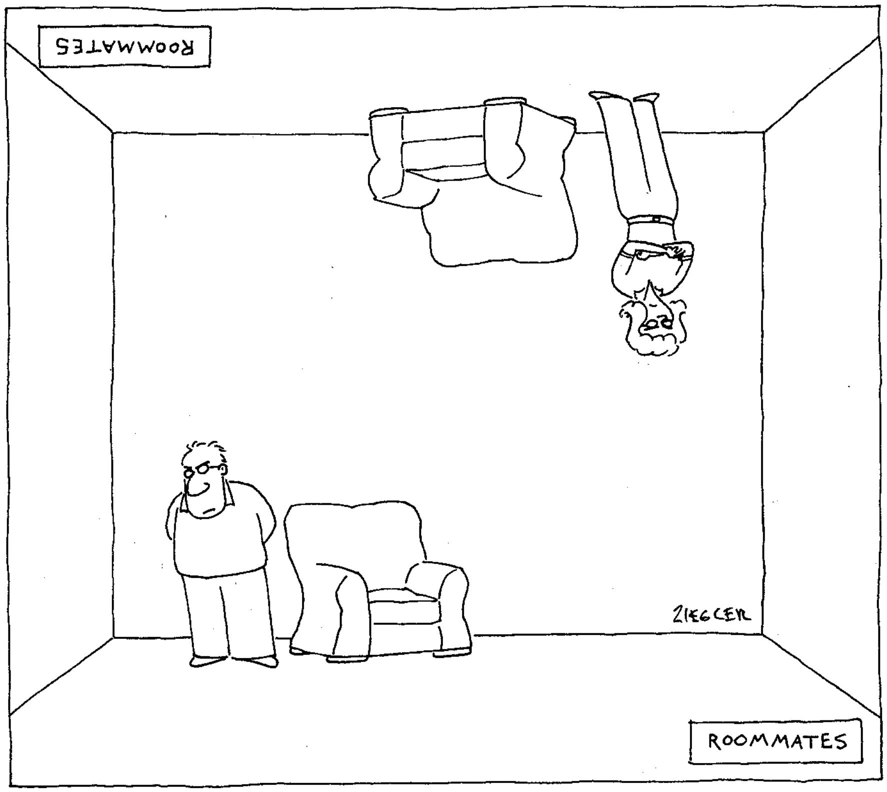
ely to be operational for fifty years and will emit some hundred million metric tons of carbon during its life. Photograph by James Balog.

was made up entirely of "polders"—land that has been laboriously reclaimed from the water. The polders were shaped like ice trays, with sloping sides and perfectly flat fields along the bottom. Every once in a while, there was a sturdy-looking farmhouse. The whole scene—the level fields, the thatched barns, even the gray clouds sitting on the horizon—could have been borrowed from a painting by Hobbema. Turkstra explained that the plan of Room for the River was to buy out the farmers who were living in the polders, then lower the dikes and let the Nieuwe Merwede flood when necessary. It was expected that the project would cost three hundred and ninety million dollars. Similar projects are under way in other parts of the Netherlands, and it is likely that in the future even more drastic measures will be necessary, including, some experts argue, the construction of a whole new outlet channel for the Rhine.

"Some people don't get it," Turkstra told me as we zipped along. "They think this project is stupid. But I think it's stupid to continue in the old way."

A few years ago, in an article in *Nature*, the Dutch chemist Paul Crutzen coined a term. No longer, he wrote, should we think of ourselves as living in the Holocene, as the period since the last glaciation is known. Instead, an epoch unlike any of those which preceded it had begun. This new age was defined by one creature—man—who had become so dominant that he was capable of altering the planet on a geological scale. Crutzen, a Nobel Prize winner, dubbed this age the Anthropocene. He proposed as its starting date the seventeen-eighties, the decade in which James Watt perfected his steam engine and, inadvertently, changed the history of the earth.

In the seventeen-eighties, ice-core records show, carbon-dioxide levels stood at about two hundred and eighty parts per million. Give or take ten parts per million, this was the same level that they had been at two thousand years earlier, in the era of Julius Caesar, and two thousand years before that, at the time of Stonehenge, and two thousand years before that, at the founding of the first cities. When, subsequently, industrialization began to drive up CO_2 levels, they rose gradually at first—it took more than a hundred and fifty years to get to three hundred and fifteen parts per million—and then much more rapidly. By the mid-nineteen-seventies, they had reached three hundred and thirty parts per million, and, by the mid-nineteen-nineties, three hundred and sixty parts per million. Just in the past decade, they have risen by as much—twenty parts per million—as they did during the previous ten thousand years of the Holocene.



For every added increment of carbon dioxide, the earth will experience a temperature rise, which represents what is called the equilibrium warming. If current trends continue, atmospheric CO_2 will reach five hundred parts per million—nearly double pre-industrial levels—around the middle of the century. It is believed that the last time CO_2 concentrations were that high was during the period known as the Eocene, some fifty million years ago. In the Eocene, crocodiles roamed Colorado and sea levels were nearly three hundred feet higher than they are today.

For all practical purposes, the recent "carbonation" of the atmosphere is irreversible. Carbon dioxide is a persistent gas; it lasts for about a century. Thus, while it is possible to increase CO_2 concentrations relatively quickly, by, say, burning fossil fuels or levelling forests, the opposite is not the case. The effect might be compared to driving a car equipped with an accelerator but no brakes.

The long-term risks of this path are well known. Barely a month passes without a new finding on the dangers posed by rising CO_2 levels—to the polar ice cap, to the survival of the world's coral reefs, to the continued existence of low-lying nations. Yet the world has barely even begun to take action. This is particularly true of the United States, which is the largest emitter of carbon dioxide by far. (The average American produces some twelve thousand pounds of CO_2 emissions annually.) As we delay, the opportunity to change course is slipping away. "We have only a few years, and not ten years but less, to do something," the Dutch state secretary for the environment, Pieter van Geel, told me when I went to visit him in The Hague.

In climate-science circles, a future in which current emissions trends continue, unchecked, is known as "business as usual," or B.A.U. A few years ago, Robert Socolow, a professor of engineering at Princeton, began to think about B.A.U. and what it implied for the fate of mankind. Socolow had recently become co-director of the Carbon Mitigation Initiative, a project funded by BP and Ford, but he still considered himself an outsider to the field of climate science. Talking to insiders, he was struck by the degree of their alarm. "I've been involved in a number of fields where there's a lay opinion and a scientific opinion," he told me when I went to talk to him shortly after returning from the Netherlands. "And, in most of the cases, it's the lay community that is more exercised, more anxious. If you take an extreme example, it would be nuclear power, where most of the people who work in nuclear science are relatively relaxed about very low levels of radiation. But, in the climate case, the experts—the people who work with the climate models every day, the people who do ice cores—they are *more* concerned. They're going out of their way to say, 'Wake up! This is not a good thing to be doing.' "

Socolow, who is sixty-seven, is a trim man with wire-rimmed glasses and gray, vaguely Einsteinian hair. Although by training he is a theoretical physicist—he did his doctoral research on quarks—he has spent most of his career working on problems of a more human scale, like how to prevent nuclear proliferation or construct buildings that don't leak heat. In the nineteen-seventies, Socolow helped design an energy-efficient housing development, in Twin Rivers, New Jersey. At another point, he developed a system—never commercially viable—to provide air-conditioning in the summer using ice created in the winter. When Socolow became co-director of the Carbon Mitigation Initiative, he decided that the first thing he needed to do was get a handle on the scale of the problem. He found that the existing literature on the subject offered almost too much information. In addition to B.A.U., a dozen or so alternative scenarios, known by code names like A1 and B1, had been devised; these all tended to jumble together in his mind, like so many Scrabble tiles. "I'm pretty quantitative, but I could not remember these graphs from one day to the next," he recalled. He decided to try to streamline the problem, mainly so that he could understand it.

There are two ways to measure carbon-dioxide emissions. One is to count the full weight of the CO_2; the other, favored by the scientific community, is to count just the weight of the carbon. Using the latter measure, global emissions last year amounted to seven billion metric tons. (The United States contributed more than twenty per cent of the total, or 1.6 billion metric tons of carbon.) "Business as usual" yields several different estimates of future emissions: a mid-range projection is that carbon emissions will reach 10.5 billion metric tons a year by 2029, and fourteen billion tons a year by 2054. Holding emissions constant at today's levels means altering this trajectory so that fifty years from now seven billion of those fourteen billion tons of carbon aren't being poured into the atmosphere.

Stabilizing CO_2 emissions, Socolow realized, would be a monumental undertaking, so he decided to break the problem down into more manageable blocks, which he called "stabilization wedges." For simplicity's sake, he defined a stabilization wedge as a step that would be sufficient to prevent a billion metric tons of carbon per year from being emitted by 2054. Along with a Princeton colleague, Stephen Pacala, he eventually came up with fifteen different wedges—theoretically, at least eight more than would be necessary to stabilize emissions. These fall, very roughly, into three categories—wedges that deal with energy demand, wedges that deal with energy supply, and wedges that deal with "capturing" CO_2 and storing it somewhere other than the atmosphere. Last year, the two men published their findings in a paper in *Science* which received a great deal of attention. The paper was at once upbeat—"Humanity already possesses the fundamental scientific, technical, and industrial know-how to solve the carbon and climate problem for the next half-century," it declared—and deeply sobering. "There is no easy wedge" is how Socolow put it to me.

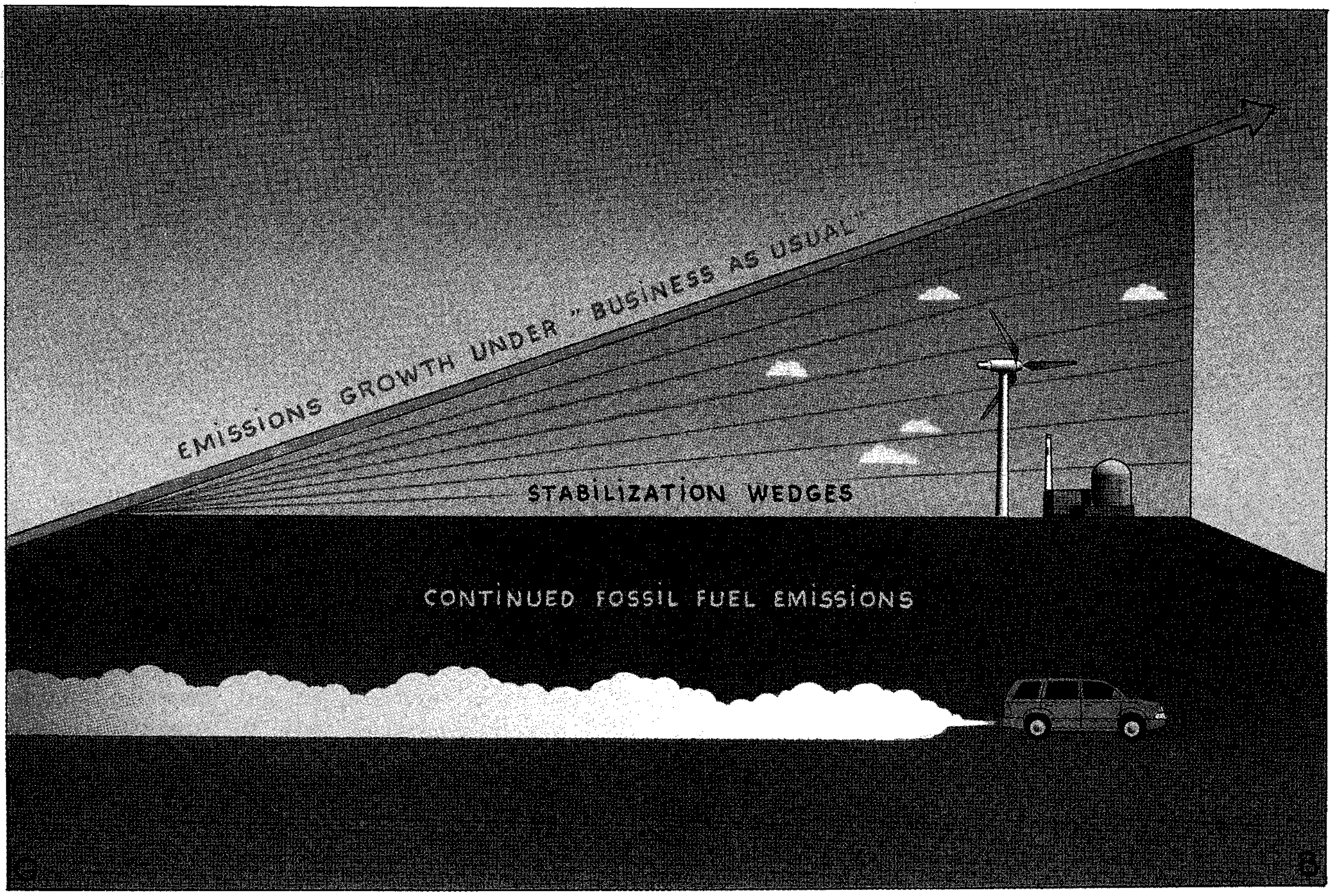
Consider wedge No. 11. This is the photovoltaic, or solar-power, wedge—probably the most appealing of all the alternatives, at least in the abstract. Photovoltaic cells, which have been around for more than fifty years, are already in use in all sorts of small-scale applications and in some larger ones where the cost of connecting to the electrical grid is prohibitively high. The technology, once installed, is completely emissions-free, producing no waste products, not even water. Assuming that a thousand-megawatt coal-fired power plant produces about 1.5 million tons of carbon a year—in the future, coal plants are expected to become more efficient—to get a wedge out of photovoltaics would require enough cells to produce seven hundred thousand megawatts. Since sunshine is intermittent, two million megawatts of capacity is needed to produce that much power. This, it turns out, would require PV arrays covering a surface area of five million acres—approximately the size of Connecticut.

Wedge No. 10 is wind electricity. The standard output of a wind turbine is two megawatts, so to get a wedge out of wind power would require at least a million turbines. Other wedges present different challenges, some technical, some social. Nuclear power produces no carbon dioxide; instead, it generates radioactive waste, with all the attendant problems of storage, disposal, and international policing. Currently, there are four hundred and forty-one nuclear power plants in the world; one wedge would require doubling their capacity. There are also two automobile wedges. The first requires that every car in the world be driven half as much as it is today. The second requires that it be twice as efficient. (Since 1987, the fuel efficiency of passenger vehicles in the U.S. has actually declined, by more than five per cent.)

Three of the possible options are based on a technology known as "carbon capture and storage," or C.C.S. As the name suggests, with C.C.S. carbon dioxide is "captured" at the source—presumably a power plant or other large emitter. Then it is injected at very high pressure into geological formations, such as depleted oil fields, underground. No power plants actually use C.C.S. at this point, nor is it certain that CO_2 injected underground will remain there permanently; the world's longest-running C.C.S. effort, maintained by the Norwegian oil company Statoil at a natural-gas field in the North Sea, has been operational for only eight years. One wedge of C.C.S. would require thirty-five hundred projects on the scale of Statoil's.

In a world like today's, where there is, for the most part, no direct cost to emitting CO_2, none of Socolow's wedges are apt to be implemented; this is, of course, why they represent a departure from "business as usual." To alter the economics against carbon requires government intervention. Countries could set a strict limit on CO_2, and then let emitters buy and sell carbon "credits." (In the United States, this same basic strategy has been used successfully with sulfur dioxide in order to curb acid rain.) Another alternative is to levy a tax on carbon. Both of these options have been extensively studied by economists; using their work, Socolow estimates that the cost of emitting carbon would have to rise to around a hundred dollars a ton to provide a sufficient incentive to adopt many of the options he has proposed. Assuming that the cost were passed on to consumers, a hundred dollars a ton would raise the price of a kilowatt-hour of coal-generated electricity by about two cents, which would add roughly fifteen dollars a month to the average American family's electricity bill. (In the U.S., more than fifty per cent of electricity is generated by coal.)

All of Socolow's calculations are based on the notion—clearly hypothetical—that steps to stabilize emissions will be taken immediately, or at least within the next few years. This assumption is key not only because we are constantly pumping more CO_2 into the atmosphere but also because we are constantly building infrastructure that, in effect, guarantees that that much additional CO_2 will be released in the future. In the U.S., the average new car gets about twenty miles to the gallon; if it is driven a hundred thousand miles, it will produce almost forty-three metric tons of carbon during its lifetime. A thousand-megawatt coal plant built today, meanwhile, is likely to last fifty years; if it is constructed without C.C.S. capability, it will emit some hundred million tons of carbon during its life. The overriding message of Socolow's wedges is that the longer we wait—and the more infrastructure we build without regard to its impact on emissions—the more daunting the task of keeping CO_2 levels below five hundred parts per million will become. Indeed, even if we were to hold emissions steady for the next half century, Socolow's graphs show that much steeper cuts would be needed in the following half century to keep CO_2 concentrations from exceeding that level. After a while, I asked Socolow whether he thought that stabilizing emissions was a politically feasible goal. He frowned.


EMISSIONS GROWTH UNDER "BUSINESS AS USUAL"
STABILIZATION WEDGES
CONTINUED FOSSIL FUEL EMISSIONS

If current trends continue unchecked, annual carbon emissions could roughly double, to fourteen billion metric tons, by 2054. Each proposed "stabilization wedge" (solar power, nuclear power, etc.) would reduce emissions by a billion tons. None will be easy.

"I'm always being asked, 'What can you say about the practicability of various targets?' " he told me. "I really think that's the wrong question. These things can all be done.

"What kind of issue is like this that we faced in the past?" he continued. "I think it's the kind of issue where something looked extremely difficult, and not worth it, and then people changed their minds. Take child labor. We decided we would not have child labor and goods would become more expensive. It's a changed preference system. Slavery also had some of those characteristics a hundred and fifty years ago. Some people thought it was wrong, and they made their argu-

GUY BILLOUT

ments, and they didn't carry the day. And then something happened and all of a sudden it was wrong and we didn't do it anymore. And there were social costs to that. I suppose cotton was more expensive. We said, 'That's the trade-off; we don't want to do this anymore.' So we may look at this and say, 'We are tampering with the earth.' The earth is a twitchy system. It's clear from the record that it does things that we don't fully understand. And we're not going to understand them in the time period we have to make these decisions. We just know they're there. We may say, 'We just don't want to do this to ourselves.' If it's a problem like that, then asking whether it's practical or not is really not going to help very much. Whether it's practical depends on how much we give a damn."

Marty Hoffert is a professor of physics at New York University. He is big and bearish, with a wide face and silvery hair. Hoffert got his undergraduate degree in aeronautical engineering, and one of his first jobs, in the mid-nineteen-sixties, was helping to develop the U.S.'s antiballistic-missile system. Eventually, he decided that he wanted to work on something, in his words, "more productive." In this way, he became involved in climate research. Hoffert is primarily interested in finding new, carbon-free ways to generate energy. He calls himself a "technological optimist," and a lot of his ideas about electric power have a wouldn't-it-be-cool, Buck Rogers sound to them. On other topics, though, Hoffert is a killjoy.

"We have to face the quantitative nature of the challenge," he told me one day over lunch at the N.Y.U. faculty club. "Right now, we're going to just burn everything up; we're going to heat the atmosphere to the temperature it was in the Cretaceous, when there were crocodiles at the poles. And then everything will collapse."

Currently, the new technology that Hoffert is pushing is space-based solar power, or S.S.P. In theory, at least, S.S.P. involves launching into space satellites equipped with massive photovoltaic arrays. Once a satellite is in orbit, the array would unfold or, according to some plans, inflate. S.S.P. has two important advantages over conventional, land-based solar power. In the first place, there is more sunlight in space—roughly eight times as much, per unit of area—and, in the second, this sunlight is constant: satellites are not affected by clouds or by nightfall. The obstacles, meanwhile, are several. No full-scale test of S.S.P. has ever been conducted. (In the nineteen-seventies, NASA studied the idea of sending a photovoltaic array the size of Manhattan into space, but the project never, as it were, got off the ground.) Then, there is the expense of launching satellites. Finally, once the satellites are up, there is the difficulty of getting the energy down. Hoffert imagines solving this last problem by using microwave beams of the sort used by cell-phone towers, only much more tightly focussed. He believes, as he put it to me, that S.S.P. has a great deal of "long-term promise"; however, he is quick to point out that he is open to other ideas, like putting solar collectors on the moon, or using superconducting wires to transmit electricity with minimal energy loss, or generating wind power using turbines suspended in the jet stream. The important thing, he argues, is not *which* new technology will work but simply that *some* new technology be found. A few years ago, Hoffert published an influential paper in *Science* in which he argued that holding CO_2 levels below five hundred parts per million would require a "Herculean" effort and probably could be accomplished only through "revolutionary" changes in energy production.

"The idea that we already possess the 'scientific, technical, and industrial know-how to solve the carbon problem' is true in the sense that, in 1939, the technical and scientific expertise to build nuclear weapons existed," he told me, quoting Socolow. "But it took the Manhattan Project to make it so."

Hoffert's primary disagreement with Socolow, which both men took pains to point out to me and also took pains to try to minimize, is over the future trajectory of CO_2 emissions. For the past several decades, as the world has turned increasingly from coal to oil, natural gas, and nuclear power, emissions of CO_2 per unit of energy have declined, a process known as "decarbonization." In the "business as usual" scenario that Socolow uses, it is assumed that decarbonization will continue. To assume this, however, is to ignore several emerging trends. Most of the growth in energy usage in the next few decades is due to occur in places like China and India, where supplies of coal far exceed those of oil or natural gas. (China, which has plans to build five hundred and sixty-two coal-fired plants by 2012, is expected to overtake the U.S. as the world's largest carbon emitter around 2025.) Meanwhile, global production of oil and gas is expected to start to decline—according to some experts, in twenty or thirty years, and to others by the end of this decade. Hoffert predicts that the world will start to "recarbonize," a development that would make the task of stabilizing carbon dioxide that much more difficult. By his accounting, recarbonization will mean that as many as twelve wedges will be needed simply to keep CO_2 emissions on the same upward trajectory they're on now. (Socolow readily acknowledges that there are plausible scenarios that would push up the number of wedges needed.) Hoffert told me that he thought the federal government should be budgeting between ten and twenty billion dollars a year for primary research into new energy sources. For comparison's sake, he pointed out that the "Star Wars" missile-defense program, which still hasn't yielded a workable system, has already cost the government nearly a hundred billion dollars.

A commonly heard argument against acting to curb global warming is that the options now available are inadequate. To his dismay, Hoffert often finds his work being cited in support of this argument, with which, he says, he vigorously disagrees. "I want to make it very clear," he told me at one point. "We have to start working immediately to implement those elements that we know how to implement *and* we need to start implementing these longer-term programs. Those are not opposing ideas."

"Let me say this," he said at another point. "I'm not sure we can solve the problem. I hope we can. I think we have a shot. I mean, it may be that we're not going to solve global warming, the earth is going to become an ecological disaster, and, you know, somebody will visit in a few hundred million years and find there were some intelligent beings who lived here for a while, but they just couldn't handle the transition from being hunter-gatherers to high technology. It's certainly possible. Carl Sagan had an equation—the Drake equation—for how many intelligent species there are in the galaxy. He figured it out by saying, How many stars are there, how many planets are there around these stars, what's the probability that life will evolve on a planet, what's the probability if you have life evolve of having intelligent species evolve, and, once that happens, what's the average lifetime of a technological civilization? And that last one is the most sensitive number. If the average lifetime is about a hundred years, then probably, in the whole galaxy of four hundred billion stars, there are only a few that have intelligent civilizations. If the lifetime is several million years, then the galaxy is teeming with intelligent life. It's sort of interesting to look at it that way. And we don't know. We could go either way."

In theory, at least, the world has already committed itself to addressing global warming, a commitment that dates back more than a decade. In June of 1992, the United Nations held the so-called Earth Summit, in Rio de Janeiro. There, representatives from virtually every nation on earth met to discuss the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, which had as its sweeping objective the "stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic"—man-made—"interference with the climate system." One of the early signatories was President George H. W. Bush, who, while in Rio, called on world leaders to translate "the words spoken here into concrete action to protect the planet." Three months later, Bush submitted the Framework Convention to the U.S. Senate, which approved it by unanimous consent. Ultimately, the treaty was ratified by a hundred and sixty-five countries.

What "dangerous anthropogenic interference," or D.A.I., consists of was not precisely defined in the Framework Convention, although there are, it is generally agreed, a number of scenarios that would fit the bill—climate change dramatic enough to destroy entire ecosystems, for instance, or severe enough to disrupt the world's food supply. The disintegration of one of the planet's remaining ice sheets is often held up as the exemplary climate disaster; were the Greenland or the West Antarctic Ice Sheet to be destroyed, sea levels around the world would rise by at least fifteen feet, inundating areas where today hundreds of millions of people live. (Were both ice sheets to disintegrate, global sea levels would rise by thirty-five feet.) It could take hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of years for either of the ice sheets to disappear entirely, but, once the disintegration was under way, it would start to feed on itself, most likely becoming irreversible. D.A.I. is understood, therefore, to refer not to the end of the process but to the very beginning, which is to say, to the point at which greenhouse-gas levels became high enough to set disaster in motion.

Among the stipulations of the Framework Convention was that the parties meet regularly to assess their progress. (These meetings became known as the Conference of the Parties, or C.O.P., sessions.) As it turned out, there was hardly any progress to assess. Article 4, paragraph 2, subparagraph b of the convention instructs industrialized nations to "aim" to reduce their greenhouse-gas emissions to 1990 levels. By 1995, the collective emissions from these nations were still rising. (Virtually the only countries that had succeeded in returning to 1990 levels were some former members of the Soviet bloc, and this was because their economies were in free fall.) Several rounds of often bitter negotiations followed, culminating in an eleven-day session at the Kyoto International Conference Hall in December, 1997.

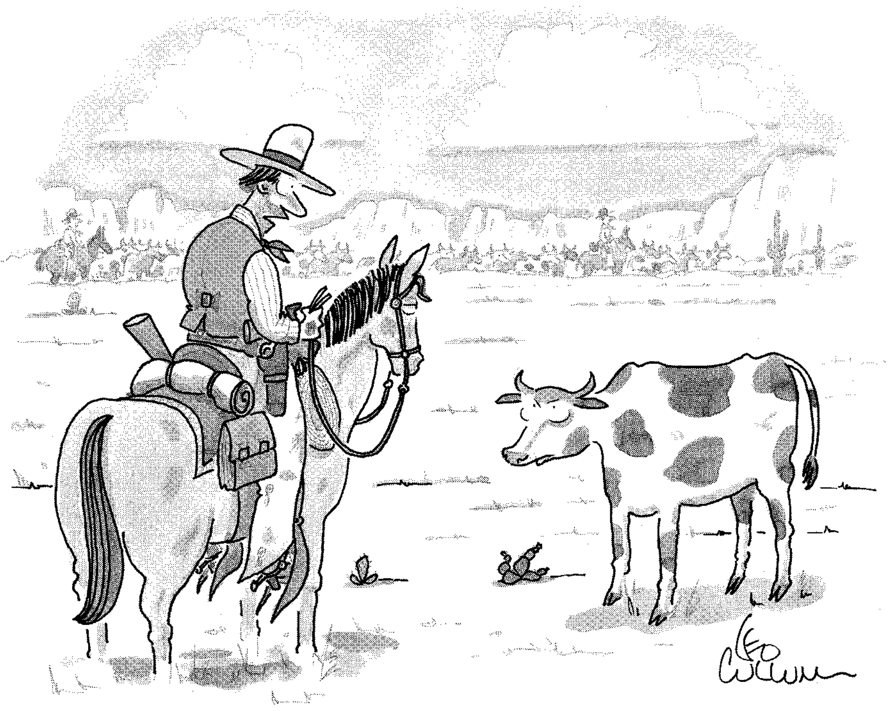
Technically speaking, the agreement that emerged from that session is an addendum to the Framework Convention. (Its full title is the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.) For lofty exhortations, the Kyoto Protocol substitutes mandatory commitments. These commitments apply to industrialized, or so-called Annex 1, nations, a group that includes the United States, Canada, Japan, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and several countries of the erstwhile Eastern bloc. Different Annex 1 nations have slightly different obligations, based on a combination of historical and political factors. The European Union nations, for example, are supposed to reduce their greenhouse-gas emissions eight per cent below 1990 levels. The U.S. has a target of seven per cent below 1990 levels, and Japan has a target of six per cent below. The treaty covers five greenhouse gases in addition to CO_2—methane, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons, and sulfur hexafluoride—which, for the purposes of accounting, are converted into units known as "carbon-dioxide equivalents." Industrialized nations can meet their targets, in part, by buying and selling emissions credits and by investing in "clean development" projects in developing, or so-called non-Annex 1, nations. This second group includes emergent industrial powers like China and India, oil-producing states like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and nations with mostly subsistence economies, like Sudan. Non-Annex 1 nations have no obligation to reduce their emissions during the period covered by the protocol, which ends in 2012.

In political terms, global warming might be thought of as the tragedy of the commons writ very, very large. The goal of stabilizing CO_2 concentrations effectively turns emissions into a limited resource, which nobody owns but everybody with a book of matches has access to.

Even as Kyoto was being negotiated, it was clear that the treaty was going to face stiff opposition in Washington. In July of 1997, Senator Chuck Hagel, Republican of Nebraska, and Senator Robert Byrd, Democrat of West Virginia, introduced a "sense of the Senate" resolution that, in effect, warned the Clinton Administration against the direction that the talks were taking. The so-called Byrd-Hagel Resolution stated that the U.S. should reject any agreement that committed it to reducing emissions unless concomitant obligations were imposed on developing countries as well. The Senate approved the resolution by a vote of 95–0, an outcome that reflected lobbying by both business and labor. Although the Clinton Administration eventually signed Kyoto, it never submitted the protocol to the Senate for ratification, citing the need for participation by "key developing nations."

From a certain perspective, the logic behind the Byrd-Hagel Resolution is unimpeachable. Emissions controls cost money, and this cost has to be borne by somebody. If the U.S. were to agree to limit its greenhouse gases while economic competitors like China and India were not, then American companies would be put at a disadvantage. "A treaty that requires binding commitments for reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases for the industrial countries but not developing countries will create a very damaging situation for the American economy" is how Richard Trumka, the secretary-treasurer of the A.F.L.-C.I.O., put it when he travelled to Kyoto to lobby against the protocol. It is also true that an agreement that limits carbon emissions in some countries and not in others could result in a migration, rather than an actual reduction, of CO_2 emissions. (Such a possibility is known in climate parlance as "leakage.")

From another perspective, however, the logic of Byrd-Hagel is deeply, even obscenely, self-serving. Suppose for a moment that the total anthropogenic CO_2 that can be emitted into the atmosphere were a big ice-cream cake. If the aim is to keep concentrations below five hundred parts per million, then roughly half that cake has already been consumed, and, of that half, the lion's share has been polished off by the industrialized world. To insist now that all countries cut their emissions simultaneously amounts to advocating that industrialized nations be allocated most of the remaining slices, on the ground that they've already gobbled up so much. In a year, the average American produces the same greenhouse-gas emissions as four and a half Mexicans, or eighteen Indians, or ninety-nine Bangladeshis. If both the U.S. and India were to reduce their emissions proportionately, then the average Bostonian could continue indefinitely producing eighteen times as much greenhouse gases as the average Bangalorean. But why should anyone have the right to emit more than anyone else? At a climate meeting in New Delhi three years ago, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, then the Indian prime minister, told world leaders, "Our per capita greenhouse gas emissions are only a fraction of the world average and an order of magnitude below that of many developed countries. We do not believe that the ethos of democracy can support any norm other than equal per capita rights to global environmental resources."



"No one is making you do anything you don't want. I'm just saying we're all headed for Dodge City and we think you should come along."

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Outside the U.S., the decision to exempt developing nations from Kyoto's mandates was generally regarded as an adequate—if imperfect—solution. The point was to get the process started, and to persuade countries like China and India to sign on later. This "two-world" approach had been employed—successfully—in the nineteen-eighties to phase out chlorofluorocarbons, the chemicals responsible for depleting atmospheric ozone. Pieter van Geel, the Dutch environment secretary, who is a member of the Netherlands' center-right Christian Democratic Party, described the European outlook to me as follows: "We cannot say, 'Well, we have our wealth, based on the use of fossil fuels for the last three hundred years, and, now that your countries are growing, you may not grow at this rate, because we have a climate-change problem.' We should show moral leadership by giving the example. That's the only way we can ask something of these other countries."

The Kyoto Protocol finally went into effect on February 16th of this year. In many cities, the event was marked by celebration; the city of Bonn hosted a reception in the Rathaus, Oxford University held an "Entry Into Force" banquet, and in Hong Kong there was a Kyoto prayer meeting. As it happened, that day, an exceptionally warm one in Washington, D.C., I went to speak to the Under-Secretary of State for Global Affairs, Paula Dobriansky.

Dobriansky is a slight woman with shoulder-length brown hair and a vaguely anxious manner. Among her duties is explaining the Bush Administration's position on global warming to the rest of the world; in December, for example, she led the U.S. delegation to the tenth Conference of the Parties, which was held in Buenos Aires. Dobriansky began by assuring me that the Administration took the issue of climate change "very seriously." She went on, "Also let me just add, because in terms of taking it seriously, not only stating to you that we take it seriously, we have engaged many countries in initiatives and efforts, whether they are bilateral initiatives—we have some fourteen bilateral initiatives—and in addition we have put together some multilateral initiatives. So we view this as a serious issue."

Besides the U.S., the only other major industrialized nation that has rejected Kyoto—and, with it, mandatory cuts in emissions—is Australia. I asked Dobriansky how she justified the U.S.'s stance to its allies. "We have a common goal and objective as parties to the U. N. Framework Convention on Climate Change," she told me. "Where we differ is on what approach we believe is and can be the most effective."

VISITING STANLEY KUNITZ

I have flown the Atlantic
To reach you in your chair.
Cuddling up, we talk about
Flowers, important things,
And hold hands to celebrate
Spring gentian's heavenly
(Strictly speaking) blue.
You grow anemones,
You say, wind's daughters.
I say the world should name
A flower after you, Stanley.
We read each other poems.
You who'll be a hundred soon
Take forever to sign

Running for President in 2000, George W. Bush called global warming "an issue that we need to take very seriously." He promised, if elected, to impose federal limits on CO_2. Soon after his inauguration, he sent the head of the Environmental Protection Agency, Christine Todd Whitman, to a meeting of environment ministers from the world's leading industrialized nations, where she elaborated on his position. Whitman assured her colleagues that the new President believed global warming to be "one of the greatest environmental challenges that we face" and that he wanted to "take steps to move forward." Ten days after her presentation, Bush announced that not only was he withdrawing the U.S. from the ongoing negotiations over Kyoto—the protocol had left several complex issues of implementation to be resolved later—he was now opposed to any mandatory curbs on carbon dioxide. Explaining his change of heart, Bush asserted that he no longer believed that CO_2 limits were justified, owing to the "state of scientific knowledge of the causes of, and solutions to, global climate change," which he labelled "incomplete." (Former Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill, who backed the President's original position, has speculated publicly that the reversal was engineered by Vice-President Dick Cheney.)

The following year, President Bush came forward with the Administration's current position on global warming. Central to this policy is a reworking of the key categories. Whereas Kyoto and the original Framework Convention aim at controlling greenhouse-gas emissions, the President's policy targets greenhouse-gas "intensity." Bush has declared his approach preferable because it recognizes "that a nation that grows its economy is a nation that can afford investments and new technology."

Greenhouse-gas intensity is not a quantity that can be measured directly. Rather, it is a ratio that relates emissions to economic output. Say, for example, that one year a business produces a hundred pounds of carbon and a hundred dollars' worth of goods. Its greenhouse-gas intensity in that case would be one pound per dollar. If the next year that company produces the same amount of carbon but an extra dollar's worth of goods, its intensity will have fallen by one per cent. Even if it doubles its total emissions of carbon, a company—or a country—can still claim a reduced intensity provided that it more than doubles its output of goods. (Typically, a country's greenhouse-gas intensity is measured in terms of tons of carbon per million dollars' worth of gross domestic product.)

To focus on greenhouse-gas intensity is to give a peculiarly sunny account of the United States' situation. Between 1990 and 2000, the U.S.'s greenhouse-gas intensity fell by some seventeen per cent, owing to several factors, including the shift toward a more service-based economy. Meanwhile, over-all emissions rose by some twelve per cent. (In terms of greenhouse-gas intensity, the U.S. actually performs better than many Third World nations, because even though we consume a lot more energy, we also have a much larger G.D.P.) In February of 2002, President Bush set the goal of reducing the country's greenhouse-gas intensity by eighteen per cent over the following ten years. During that same decade, the Administration expects the American economy to grow by three per cent annually. If both expectations are met, over-all emission of greenhouse gases will rise by about twelve per cent.

The Administration's plan, which relies almost entirely on voluntary measures, has been characterized by critics as nothing more than a subterfuge—"a total charade" is how Philip Clapp, the president of the Washington-based National Environmental Trust, once put it. Certainly, if the goal is to prevent "dangerous anthropogenic interference," then greenhouse-gas intensity is the wrong measure to use. (Essentially, the President's approach amounts to following the path of "business as usual.") The Administration's response to such criticism is to attack its premise. "Science tells us that we cannot say with any certainty what constitutes a dangerous level of warming and therefore what level must be avoided," Dobriansky declared recently. When I asked her how, in that case, the U.S. could support the U.N. Framework Convention's aim of averting D.A.I., she answered by saying—twice—"We predicate our policies on sound science."

Earlier this year, the chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, James Inhofe, gave a speech on the Senate floor, which he entitled "An Update on the Science of Climate Change." In the speech, Inhofe, an Oklahoma Republican, announced that "new evidence" had come to light that "makes a mockery" of the notion that human-induced warming is occurring. The Senator, who has called global warming "the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people," went on to argue that this im-

My copy of "Passing Through."
What flower can I offer you
From Ireland? Bog asphodel
Is the color of your shirt.
Grass of Parnassus? Mountain
Everlasting in New York?
Your walker-gavotte suggests
Madder with its goose-grassy
Tenacity, your age spots
Winter-flowering mudwort.
But no, no. Let it be
Spring gentian, summer sky
At sunset, Athene's eyes,
Five petals, earthbound star.

—*Michael Longley*

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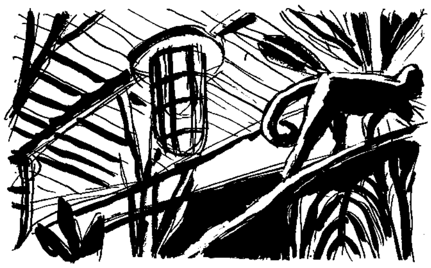
portant new evidence was being suppressed by "alarmists" who view anthropogenic warming as "an article of religious faith." One of the authorities that Inhofe repeatedly cited in support of his claims was the fiction writer Michael Crichton.

It was an American scientist, Charles David Keeling, who, in the nineteen-fifties, developed the technology to measure CO_2 levels precisely, and it was American researchers who, working out of Hawaii's Mauna Loa Observatory, first showed that these levels were steadily rising. In the half century since then, the U.S. has contributed more than any other nation to the advancement of climate science, both theoretically, through the work of climate modellers, and experimentally, through field studies conducted on every continent.

At the same time, the U.S. is also the world's chief purveyor of the work of so-called global-warming "skeptics." The ideas of these skeptics are published in books with titles like "The Satanic Gases" and "Global Warming and Other Eco-Myths" and then circulated on the Web by groups like Tech Central Station, which is sponsored by, among others, ExxonMobil and General Motors. While some skeptics' organizations argue that global warming isn't real, or at least hasn't been proved—"Predicting *weather* conditions a day or two in advance is hard enough, so just imagine how hard it is to forecast what our *climate* will be," Americans for Balanced Energy Choices, a lobbying organization funded by mining and power companies, declares on its Web site—others maintain that rising CO_2 levels are actually cause for celebration.

"Carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuel combustion are beneficial to life on earth," the Greening Earth Society, an organization created by the Western Fuels Association, a utility group, states. Atmospheric levels of seven hundred and fifty parts per million—nearly triple pre-industrial levels—are nothing to worry about, the society maintains, because plants like lots of CO_2, which they need for photosynthesis. (Research on this topic, the group's Web site acknowledges, has been "frequently denigrated," but "it's exciting stuff" and provides an "antidote to gloom-and-doom about potential changes in earth's climate.")

In legitimate scientific circles, it is virtually impossible to find evidence of disagreement over the fundamentals of global warming. This fact was neatly demonstrated last year by Naomi Oreskes, a professor of history and science studies at the University of California at San Diego. Oreskes conducted a study of the more than nine hundred articles on climate change published in refereed journals between 1993 and 2003 and subsequently made available on a leading research database. Of these, she found that seventy-five per cent endorsed the view that anthropogenic emissions were responsible for at least some of the observed warming of the past fifty years. The remaining twenty-five per cent, which dealt with questions of methodology or climate history, took no position on current conditions. Not a single article disputed the premise that anthropogenic warming is under way.



Still, pronouncements by groups like the Greening Earth Society and politicians like Senator Inhofe help to shape public discourse on climate change in this country. And this is clearly their point. A few years ago, the pollster Frank Luntz prepared a strategy memo for Republican members of Congress, coaching them on how to deal with a variety of environmental issues. (Luntz, who first made a name for himself by helping to craft Newt Gingrich's "Contract with America," has been described as "a political consultant viewed by Republicans as King Arthur viewed Merlin.") Under the heading "Winning the Global Warming Debate," Luntz wrote, "The scientific debate is closing (against us) but not yet closed. There is still a window of opportunity to challenge the science." He warned, "Voters believe that there is *no consensus* about global warming in the scientific community. Should the public come to believe that the scientific issues are settled, their views about global warming will change accordingly." Luntz also advised, "The most important principle in any discussion of global warming is your commitment to sound science."

It is in this context, and really only in this context, that the Bush Administration's conflicting claims about the science of global warming make any sense. Administration officials are quick to point to the scientific uncertainties that remain about global warming, of which there are many. But where there is broad scientific agreement they are reluctant to acknowledge it. "When we make decisions, we want to make sure we do so on sound science," the President said, announcing his new approach to global warming in February, 2002. Just a few months later, the Environmental Protection Agency delivered a two-hundred-and-sixty-three-page report to the U.N. which stated that "continuing growth in greenhouse gas emissions is likely to lead to annual average warming over the United States that could be as much as several degrees Celsius (roughly 3 to 9 degrees Fahrenheit) during the 21st century." The President dismissed the report—the product of years of work by federal researchers—as something "put out by the bureaucracy." The following spring, the E.P.A. made another effort to give an objective summary of climate science, in a report on the state of the environment. The White House interfered so insistently in the writing of the global-warming section—at one point, it tried to insert excerpts from a study partly financed by the American Petroleum Institute—that, in an internal memo, agency staff members complained that the section "no longer accurately represents scientific consensus." (When the E.P.A. finally published the report, the climate-science section was missing entirely.) Just two months ago, a top official with the federal Climate Change Science Program announced that he was resigning, owing to differences with the White House. The official, Rick Piltz, said that he was disturbed that the Administration insisted on vetting climate-science reports, "rather than asking independent scientists to write them and let the chips fall where they may."

The day after the Kyoto Protocol took effect, I went to the United Nations to attend a conference entitled, appositely, "One Day After Kyoto." The conference, whose subtitle was "Next Steps on Climate," was held in a large room with banks of curved desks, each equipped with a little plastic earpiece. The speakers included scientists, insurance-industry executives, and diplomats from all over the world, among them the U.N. Ambassador from the tiny Pacific island nation of Tuvalu, who described how his country was in danger of simply disappearing. Britain's permanent representative to the U.N., Sir Emyr Jones Parry, began his remarks to the crowd of two hundred or so by stating, "We can't go on as we are."

When the U.S. withdrew from negotiations over Kyoto, in 2001, the entire effort nearly collapsed. According to the protocol's elaborate ratification mechanism, in order to take effect it had to be approved by countries responsible for at least fifty-five per cent of the industrialized world's CO_2 emissions. All on its own, America accounts for thirty-four per cent of those emissions. European leaders spent more than three years working behind the scenes, lining up support from the remaining industrialized nations. The crucial threshold was finally crossed this past October, when the Russian Duma voted in favor of ratification. The Duma's vote was understood to be a condition of European backing for Russia's bid to join the World Trade Organization. ("RUSSIA FORCED TO RATIFY KYOTO PROTOCOL TO BECOME W.T.O. MEMBER," read the headline in *Pravda.*)

As speaker after speaker at the U.N. conference noted, Kyoto is only the first step in a long process. Even if every country—including the U.S.—were to fulfill its obligations under the protocol before it lapses in 2012, CO_2 concentrations in the atmosphere would still reach dangerous levels. Kyoto merely delays this outcome. The "next step on climate" requires, among other things, substantive commitments from countries like China and India. So long as U.S. emissions continue to grow, essentially unchecked, obtaining these commitments seems next to impossible. In this way, the U.S., having failed to defeat Kyoto, may be in the process of doing something even more damaging: ruining the chances of reaching a post-Kyoto agreement. "The blunt reality is that, unless America comes back into some form of international consensus, it is very hard to make progress" is how Britain's Prime Minister, Tony Blair, diplomatically put it at a recent press conference.

Astonishingly, standing in the way of progress seems to be Bush's goal. Paula Dobriansky explained the Administration's position to me as follows: While the rest of the industrialized world is pursuing one strategy (emissions limits), the U.S. is pursuing another (no emissions limits), and it is still too early to say which approach will work best. "It is essential to really implement these programs and approaches now and to take stock of their effectiveness," she said, adding, "We think it is premature to talk about future arrangements." At C.O.P.-10, in Buenos Aires, many delegations pressed for a preliminary round of meetings so that work could start on mapping out Kyoto's successor. The U.S. delegation opposed these efforts so adamantly that finally the Americans

"It means taking a healthy pay cut, but my dad has decided to stay at home and lock himself in the basement."

were asked to describe, in writing, what sort of meeting they would find acceptable. They issued half a page of conditions, one of which was that the session "shall be a one-time event held during a single day." Another condition was, paradoxically, that, if they were going to discuss the future, the future would have to be barred from discussion; presentations, they wrote, should be limited to "an information exchange" on "existing national policies." Annie Petsonk, a lawyer with the advocacy group Environmental Defense, who previously worked for the Administration of George Bush, Sr., attended the talks in Buenos Aires. She recalled the effect that the memo had on the members of the other delegations: "They were ashen."

European leaders have made no secret of their dismay at the Administration's stance. "It's absolutely obvious that global warming has started," France's President, Jacques Chirac, said after attending last year's G-8 summit with Bush. "And so we have to act responsibly, and, if we do nothing, we would bear a heavy responsibility. I had the chance to talk to the United States President about this. To tell you that I convinced him would be a total exaggeration, as you can imagine." Blair, who currently holds the presidency of the G-8, recently warned that only "timely action" on climate change will avert "disaster." He has promised to make the issue one of the top items on the agenda of this year's summit, to be held in Scotland in July, but no one seems to be expecting a great deal to come of it. While attending a meeting in London this spring, the head of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, James Connaughton, announced that he wasn't yet convinced that anthropogenic warming was a problem. "We are still working on the issue of causation, the extent to which humans are a factor," he said.

The town of Maasbommel, sixty miles southeast of Amsterdam, is a popular tourist destination along the banks of the River Meuse. Every summer, it is visited by thousands of people who come to go boating and camping. Thanks to the risk of flooding, building is restricted along the river, but a few years ago one of the Netherlands' largest construction firms, Dura Vermeer, received permission to turn a former R.V. park into a development of "amphibious homes." The first of these were completed last fall, and a few months later I went to see them.

The amphibious homes all look alike. They are tall and narrow, with flat sides and curved metal roofs, so that, standing next to one another, they resemble a row of toasters. Each one is moored to a metal pole and sits on a set of hollow concrete pontoons. Assuming that all goes according to plan, when the Meuse floods the homes will bob up and then, when the water recedes, they will gently be deposited back on land. Dura Vermeer is also working to construct buoyant roads and floating greenhouses. While each of these projects represents a somewhat different engineering challenge, they have a common goal, which is to allow people to continue to inhabit areas that, periodically at least, will be inundated. The Dutch, because of their peculiar vulnerability, can't afford to misjudge climate change, or to pretend that by denying it they can make it go away. "There is a flood market emerging," Chris Zevenbergen, Dura Vermeer's environmental director, told me. Half a dozen families were already occupying their amphibious homes when I visited Maasbommel. Anna van der Molen, a nurse and mother of four, gave me a tour of hers. She said that she expected that in the future people all over the world would live in floating houses, since, as she put it, "the water is coming up."

Resourcefulness and adaptability are, of course, essential human qualities. People are always imagining new ways to live, and then figuring out ways to remake the world to suit what they've imagined. This capacity has allowed us, collectively, to overcome any number of threats in the past, some imposed by nature, some by ourselves. It could be argued, taking this long view, that global warming is just one more test in a sequence that already stretches from plague and pestilence to the prospect of nuclear annihilation. If, at this moment, the bind that we're in appears insoluble, once we've thought long and hard enough about it we'll find—or maybe float—our way clear.

But it's also possible to take an even longer view of the situation. We now have detailed climate records going back four full glacial cycles. What these records show, in addition to a clear correlation between CO_2 levels and global temperatures, is that the last glaciation was a period of frequent and traumatic climate swings. During that period, which lasted nearly a hundred thousand years, humans who were, genetically speaking, just like ourselves wandered the globe, producing nothing more permanent than isolated cave paintings and large piles of mastodon bones. Then, ten thousand years ago, at the start of the Holocene, the climate changed. As the weather settled down, so did we. People built villages, towns, and, finally, cities, along the way inventing all the basic technologies—agriculture, metallurgy, writing—that future civilizations would rely upon. These developments would not have been possible without human ingenuity, but, until the climate coöperated, ingenuity, it seems, wasn't enough.

Climate records also show that we are steadily drawing closer to the temperature peaks of the last interglacial, when sea levels were some fifteen feet higher than they are today. Just a few degrees more and the earth will be hotter than it has been at any time since our species evolved. Scientists have identified a number of important feedbacks in the climate system, many of which are not fully understood; in general, they tend to take small changes to the system and amplify them into much larger forces. Perhaps we are the most unpredictable feedback of all. No matter what we do at this point, global temperatures will continue to rise in the coming decades, owing to the gigatons of extra CO_2 already circulating in the atmosphere. With more than six billion people on the planet, the risks of this are obvious. A disruption in monsoon patterns, a shift in ocean currents, a major drought—any one of these could easily produce streams of refugees numbering in the millions. As the effects of global warming become more and more apparent, will we react by finally fashioning a global response? Or will we retreat into ever narrower and more destructive forms of self-interest? It may seem impossible to imagine that a technologically advanced society could choose, in essence, to destroy itself, but that is what we are now in the process of doing. ♦

(This is the third part of a three-part article.)

PROFILES

THE COLOSSUS

Sonny Rollins on the bandstand.

BY STANLEY CROUCH

Not long ago, the jazz drummer Victor Lewis was hanging out at the Village Vanguard, and declared that he had finally decided what he wanted to be when he became an old man: Sonny Rollins. Lewis had recently performed with Rollins in Antibes. "Do you know that man stood up there and gave a three-and-a-half-hour concert and did most of the playing?" Lewis said. "He wasn't coasting or floating, either. He was deep in it, playing his ass off. That's surreal. Seventy-three years old, out in the hot sun, blowing a saxophone for that long—who can believe that?"

Rollins works at extremes. He is either astounding or barely all right. He hates clichés and signature phrases—"licks"—and refuses to play them. Consequently, for him there are no highly polished professional performances. When he's on, which is seven or eight times out of ten, Rollins—known as "the saxophone colossus"—seems immense, summoning the entire history of jazz, capable of blowing a hole through a wall. On his off nights, though, he can seem no more than another guy with a saxophone and a band, creeping through a gig. Those who hear him on such nights come away convinced that the Sonny Rollins of legend is long gone.

I've heard Rollins play many times during the past several years, and I've seen many versions of him. In an amphitheatre in Washington, D.C., a few summers ago, he was in good form, teasing the audience by embellishing familiar songs with new, invented melodies and fast themes. For an encore, he played "I'll Be Seeing You," a ballad turned swinger, and sent the notes soaring out over the crowd. Later, at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, in Newark, he pulled out a song that very few in the audience would know, "Let's Start the New Year Right," which was played by Louis Armstrong, one of Rollins's musical heroes. ("He found the Rosetta stone. He could translate everything," Rollins has said of Armstrong. "He could find the good in the worst material.") Rollins's calypso "Global Warming" was shrieking and rhythmic; the low notes hit with a thud. He played his horn almost to the point of hyperventilating. On the song "Why Was I Born?," he came up with a distinct motive for each eight-bar section—a remarkable expression of the power of his idiom. Rollins was heard over the hill that night.

But when Rollins is faced with a young crowd he often resorts to banal calypso tunes, playing one after another. This was the case at the House of Blues in New Orleans one night a few years ago, when I went to hear him with a writer and pianist friend. My friend was so disgusted that he vowed never to take another chance on seeing Rollins live. "Sonny gets insecure in front of young people and doesn't have the confidence to depend on his swing," a musician who used to play regularly with Rollins told me. "He knows the kids can hear that calypso beat, and he gives it to them."

Since 1980, Rollins has made more than a dozen records in the studio, but unlike many of his fellow-titans on the tenor saxophone—Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, John Coltrane—he has realized his talent almost exclusively on the bandstand. His finest recordings in the past twenty-five years have been live ones, legal and bootlegged. Running through a repertoire of Tin Pan Alley songs, jazz standards, originals, and festive calypsos—something old, something new—Rollins seems to have an endless catalogue on which to draw. If jazz improvisation is a kind of democratic expression, then Rollins may well be our greatest purveyor of utopian feeling.

For more than thirty years, Rollins has lived in a modest two-story house in Germantown, New York, a couple of hours north of Manhattan. (He kept an apartment in Tribeca, near the World Trade Center, but gave it up after September 11th. Television audiences saw Rollins board the evacuation bus wearing a surgical mask and carrying his saxophone.) The Germantown property includes a large converted stable that is used as a garage. There is a swimming pool in the back and, beyond it, a small house where Rollins writes and practices music for many hours a day. In the studio, there are pictures of Rollins on bandstands around the world; a Japanese ceramic version of him wearing Oriental robes and blowing a horn; stacks of music; an electric keyboard; and various trophies and mementos.

Rollins lives alone; Lucille, his wife of nearly forty years, died in November. (They had no children.) The bucolic simplicity of the place and the soft tones in which Rollins tends to express himself are at odds with the muscularity of his music. "I like the quiet, and I prefer being left alone," Rollins said when I went to visit him last spring. "Up here, I can choose contact with the world when I want it. That kind of freedom is a blessing, and I don't take it lightly."

Unlike Armstrong or Dizzy Gillespie, Rollins has no talent for stagecraft or show. He doesn't tell jokes onstage; he barely even smiles. He conveys his sense of humor subtly, through his music, quoting Billy Strayhorn's "Rain Check" when caught performing in a drizzle, or arriving late and walking through an irritated audience playing "Will You Still Be Mine?" And yet he has a gift for unexpected display. He shaved his head in the sixties, when a hairless dome was cause for comment, and changed his style constantly, alternating beautiful suits with ethnic robes, T-shirts, floppy purple hats, and tennis shoes. In the eighties, he dyed his hair and beard shoe-polish black. Nowadays, he has come to himself: he wears a silver-white beard and mustache, and the effect is handsome and majestic.

The youngest child of hardworking Caribbean parents, Rollins was born in Harlem on September 7, 1930. His par-

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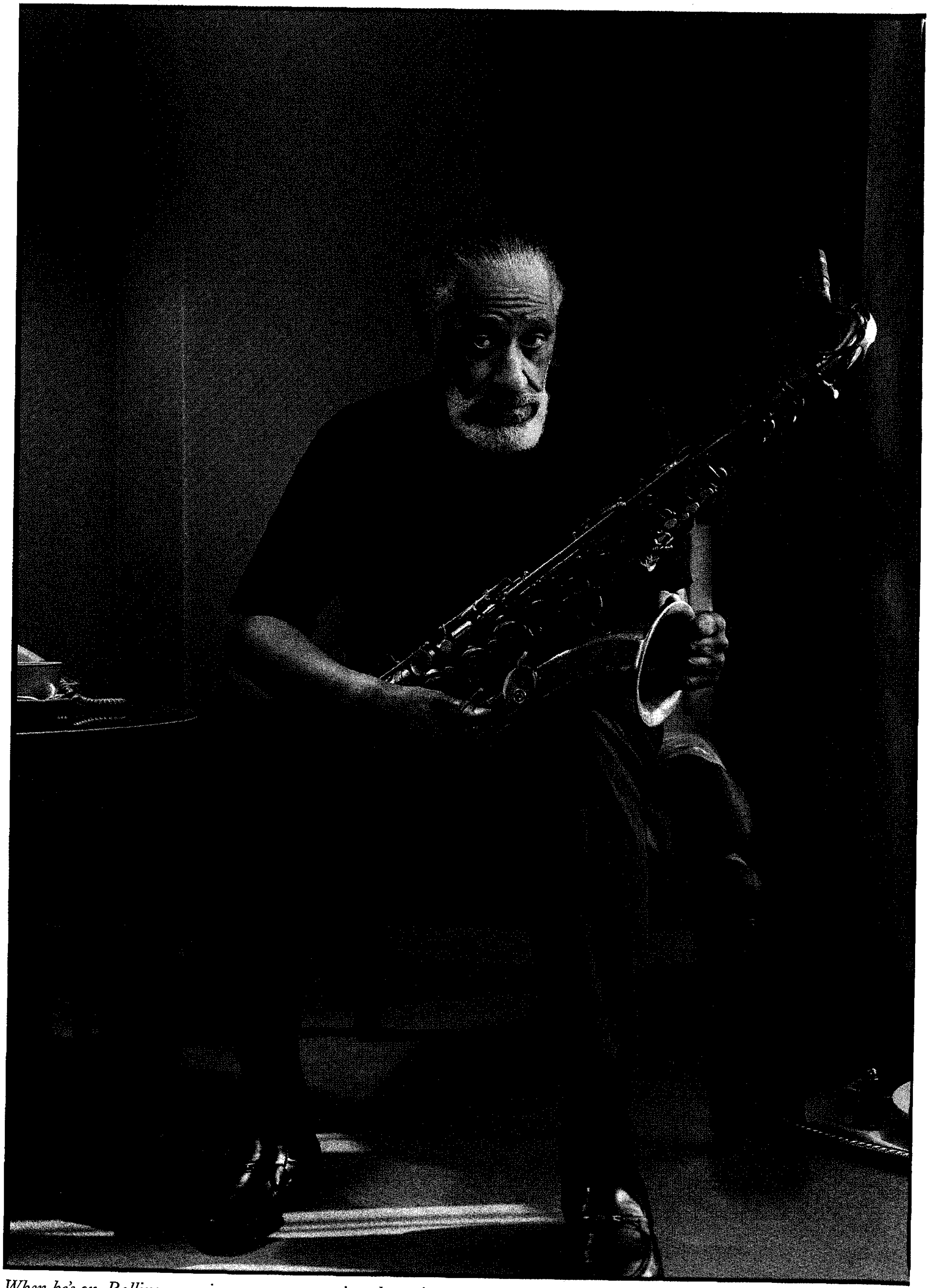


When he's on, Rollins seems immense, summoning the entire history of jazz. Photograph by Martin Schoeller.

ents were from the Virgin Islands. His father, a Navy man, was often away at sea. He had an older brother, Valdemar, and an older sister named Gloria. Rollins's given name was Walter Theodore, but, he told me, "they started to call me Sonny because I was the baby, the youngest."

When Rollins was a boy, Harlem suffered—as parts of it still do—from terrible poverty. Yet there was an intellectual and artistic renaissance. Ralph Ellison described Harlem in the nineteen-thirties as "an outpost of American optimism" and "our own homegrown version of Paris." Rollins recalls the period as a happy time. "I remember us kids playing in the lobbies of the old theatres," he said. "I remember all that wonderful music that came out of Abyssinian Baptist Church and Mother Zion. There was a great feeling then. It was a very warm thing." In 1939, the Rollins family moved to 371 Edgecomb Avenue, between 150th and 155th Streets. This was Sugar Hill, an élite neighborhood. There, Rollins often saw three very striking men: W. E. B. DuBois; Thurgood Marshall; and Walter White, the executive secretary of the N.A.A.C.P., a Negro whose light skin allowed him to go on daring undercover missions among violent Southern white racists.

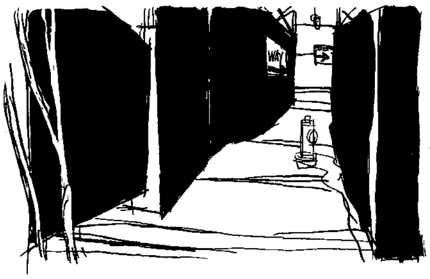
But it was Coleman Hawkins, the father of the jazz tenor saxophone, who most impressed him. Around the time the family moved to Sugar Hill, Hawkins's version of "Body and Soul" was on jukeboxes across the country. "When I was a kid, even though I didn't really know what it was, you could hear Coleman playing that song all over Harlem," Rollins said. "It was coming out of all these windows like it was sort of a theme song." To the consternation of his family, who were conservative and practical-minded, he fell in love with the saxophone and decided to become a musician. Only his mother supported his ambition, and it was she who bought him his first horn, an alto saxophone, when he was nine.

Living on the Hill gave Rollins a chance to get close to the musicians he revered. "I used to see all of these great musicians," Rollins said. "There was Coleman Hawkins, and his Cadillac and those wonderful suits he wore. Just standing on the corner, I could see Duke Ellington, Andy Kirk, Don Redman, Benny Carter, Sid Catlett, Jimmy Crawford, Charlie Shavers, Al Hall, Denzil Best, and all of these kinds of men. Those guys commanded respect in the way they carried themselves. You knew something was very true when you saw Coleman Hawkins or any of those people. They were not pretending. When they went up on the bandstand, they proved that they were just what you thought they were. You weren't dreaming. It was all real. You couldn't be more inspired."

Though the dictates of show business meant that Negro musicians had to tolerate minstrelsy and all the other commonplace denigrations, most jazz musicians of the era formed an avant-garde of suave, well-spoken men in lovely suits and ties, with their shoes shining and their pomaded hair glittering under the lights, artists ranging in color from bone and beige to brown and black. Their very sophistication was a form of rebellion: these musicians made a liar of every bigot who sought to limit what black people could and could not do, could and could not feel.

Having switched to tenor saxophone in the early forties, Rollins then led a band with some other young men from the Hill: the alto saxophonist Jackie McLean, the drummer Art Taylor, and the pianist Kenny Drew. They played "cocktail sips" in the early evening for working people and the numbers runners who moved through the crowd. "Those gigs could be something else, man," Rollins said. "Those weren't always peaceful people out to have a good time. They could get ugly. At the dances particularly, it could get very rough. You had to be vigilant every second, because fights could break out and you would have to protect yourself and your horn." What he observed in those situations—the frailty of peace and calm, as well as the ballroom ambience of slow, close dancing and whispered courtship—has never left his ballad playing.

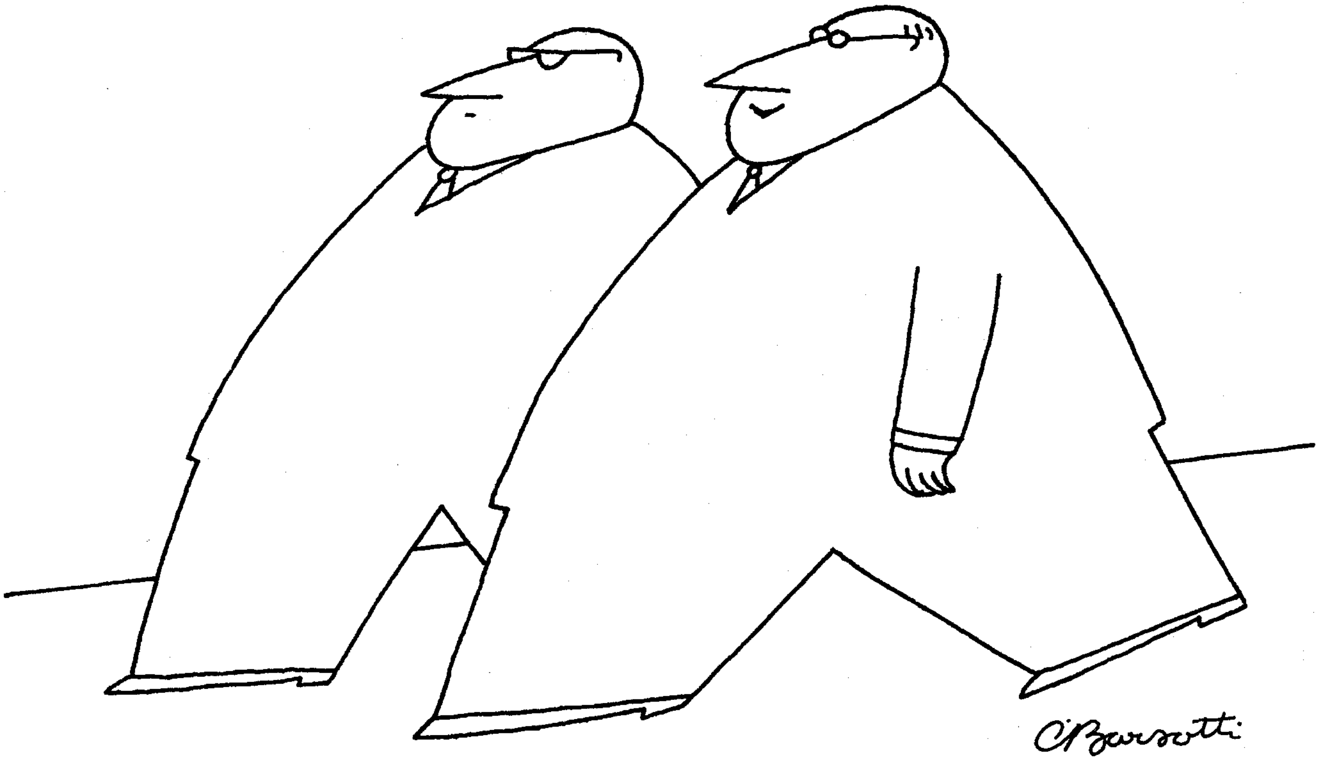
Rollins intently studied the tenor players: Ben Webster, of Kansas City; Don Byas, of Muskogee, Oklahoma; and Lester Young, of Woodville, Mississippi, and New Orleans. "That was the best ear training," he told me. "Natural musicians have to be able to do that, to cop stuff quickly by ear. That's what I am, an intuitive player. I didn't go to school to learn what I do. I spent a lot of time just practicing my horn. So I think I was playing a lot of stuff before I knew what it was. I was in the middle of that golden period of popular songs and movie music, and I retained all of that stuff. I know most of those songs, and most of the lyrics. The story begins with the melody; you keep the story going by using the melody the way you hear it as something to improvise on. In reality, it should all be connected—the melody, the chords, the rhythm. It should all turn out to be one complete thing."



Rollins also spent a lot of time at the Apollo Theatre, in Harlem. "You could get it all at the Apollo, man, all of it," he said. "If you wanted to hear Frank Sinatra, you had to go downtown, but everything else—I'm talking about giants like Billy Eckstine, Billie Holiday, and Sarah Vaughan—was at the Apollo. There would be two movies, maybe a Western and a jungle movie, or a comedy and a detective or gangster picture. There would be comedians, jugglers, dancers, and Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and every kind of band. You would have experienced all of these styles and emotions by the end of the shows." Even then, Rollins's playing was imbued with a vast array of musical Americana.

Rollins didn't become aware of the alto saxophonist Charlie (Bird) Parker until he bought a recording in the mid-forties that featured Don Byas playing "How High the Moon" on one side and Parker sailing through "Koko" on the other. Soon, he was hearing Parker at the Apollo, too. Parker was considered the most important musician in the emerging school of bebop, which demanded a new level of velocity technique, melody, and harmony, and a mastery of slippery triplet rhythms. He also brought with him the troubles of heroin. Just as musicians a generation earlier had smoked reefers when they found out that Louis Armstrong liked the stuff, so, now, did the members of the bebop movement follow Parker's self-destructive path. The result was disastrous, with many musicians dying young. Rollins said that he and his musical buddies from Sugar Hill foolishly thought that taking heroin "would make us play better."

By the end of the nineteen-forties,



"There's a thin line, J.B., between deniability and pig ignorant."

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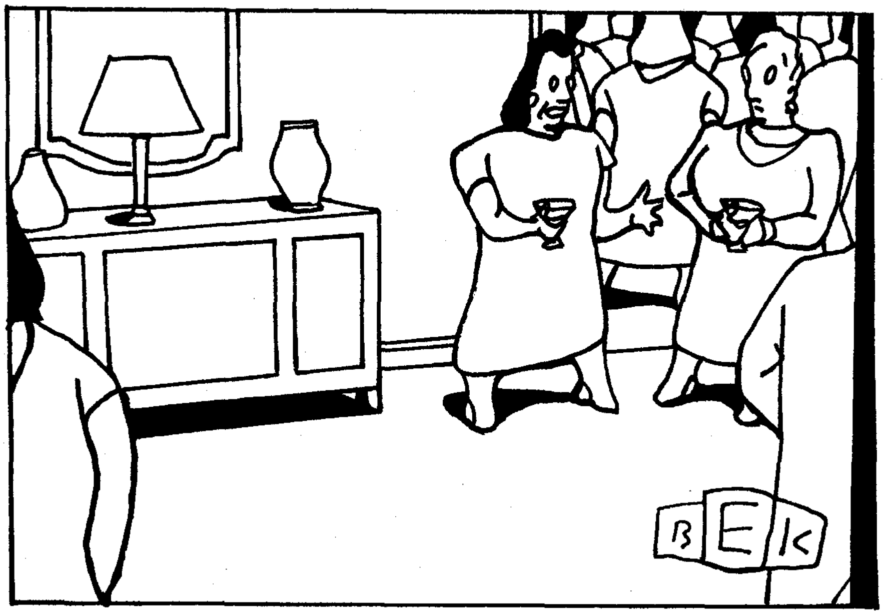
Rollins had an addiction he couldn't shake. "Sonny was a real junkie," one musician recalls. "He was a bandit, and he even looked like one. His hair was gassed up and looked real greasy. He burned just about everybody he came in contact with. That heroin had him so desperate that if he got his hands on your instrument it would end up in the pawn shop." Rollins became, as he himself put it, "persona non grata among my family." He went on, "It made me mad then, but I can understand, because I did a lot of bad things. Always stealing, always lying, always trying to get the money for those drugs. I was lost out there, like all of us were, and the only person who would forgive me and still believe in me was my mother. She never turned her back on me. I was her baby son, no matter what." For much of 1951, Rollins was in prison for attempted robbery. "When I was out there on Rikers Island, imprisoned among those criminals, I was disgusted with myself, when I wasn't thinking about the time I was losing not practicing my horn," he told me.

But even as Rollins struggled, he began to emerge as an artist. Jackie McLean told me, "I remember when Sonny came back from Rikers Island and he was standing in the door listening to one of the gigs I was holding down for him while he was gone. He asked if he could play my horn, the alto, and I handed it over. People missed that Sonny Rollins on *alto*. Sonny got up there and played 'There Will Never Be Another You.' He spat out so much music—so *much* music—that when he finished I didn't want to *touch* that horn. It was on *fire*."

In December of 1951, Rollins made a surprisingly mature recording, "Time on My Hands." His tone is big and sensual, as delicate as it is forceful. Already, at twenty-one, he had the ability to express as much tenderness as strength, melding the romantic ease of Lester Young, the robust power of Coleman Hawkins, and the lyricism of Charlie Parker. In pacing, tone, feeling, and melodic development, "Time on My Hands" is Rollins's first great piece. Loren Schoenberg, a jazz musician and scholar, says of the performance, "Compared to the other young saxophone players recording during that period—Stan Getz, Wardell Gray, Sonny Stitt, Zoot Sims, Gene Ammons—Rollins is accessing everything that had happened to the tenor saxophone. He was not just approaching the surface of the sound and the technique but the emotional depth and breadth. What is most shocking about it is that all of these other men were several years older. But Rollins sounds more mature than any of them sounded at that time."

Out of Rollins's attentiveness to his musical forebears had come a heightened sensitivity to melody, harmony, rhythm, and timbre, the shading that gives a note its emotional texture. "Those kinds of hearing are exactly the elements that make jazz so great," Gunther Schuller, the conductor and composer, says. "In the arena of art, they make the idea of schizophrenia—or multiphrenia, perhaps—not a problem but a profoundly positive thing. One is splitting up the brain to achieve all of these tasks in the interest of creative order, not any kind of fumbling disarray.

"These are the things that are beyond even most concert musicians, because, unlike Sonny Rollins and Ben Webster and those kinds of musicians, the classical musician—no matter how great—is, on the one hand, reading music or playing it from memory. On the other, he is too closely connected to what he was told about how to play by his most influential teachers. This makes it veritably impossi-



"He wrote that brilliant book about that big social trend that never actually happened."

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ble for him even to encounter, much less master, that kind of personal hearing knowledge from within his own being. Sonny Rollins discovered those things for himself, as all jazz musicians must, and what he has done with those discoveries makes him one of the greatest musicians of any serious music, no matter what name we give it, and no matter what the era or century in which it was made."

In the mid-fifties, after recording classic numbers with a variety of musicians, including Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk, and the members of the Modern Jazz Quartet, Rollins checked into a rehab program in Lexington, Kentucky, where he kicked his heroin habit. From there, he went to Chicago, where he began playing with the trumpeter Clifford Brown and the drummer Max Roach. Rollins had a special affection for Brown. "Clifford was pure," he said. "He didn't do any of the things the others of us got messed up in. He was a witty guy, very quick. He could play a strong game of chess." Brown's music reflected his acuity. "His command of his horn was intimidating," Rollins said. "He had an angelic sound. Other musicians were free to ask him technical questions and he would tell them. He didn't try to mislead you and stunt your growth like some of the competitive guys out there. Being around him lifted me up completely. Near the end, we got that unified sound you almost never hear—there was no saxophone, there was no trumpet." In Chicago, Rollins met Lucille Pearson at one of his performances. Lucille was white, and when, in 1971, she took over Rollins's business affairs, he noticed that she got more respect than he ever did.

In 1956, Brown died, at the age of twenty-five, in an automobile accident on the Pennsylvania Turnpike. He and the band's pianist, Richie Powell, who also died, were on their way to Chicago for a gig. Roach and Rollins were waiting for them there in a hotel when they got the news. "When I told Sonny what had happened, he just turned around and went back to his room," Roach said. "You could hear that tenor saxophone playing all night."

Shortly thereafter, Rollins and Lucille moved back to New York, and he recorded "Saxophone Colossus." One of the great small-group recordings, it showcased Rollins's improvisational powers. In 1957, he made the equally extraordinary "Way Out West," his first recording using only bass and drums. On the album cover, Rollins wears the high-camp garb of a gunslinger: a ten-gallon hat and a holster. The following year, he recorded his most adventurous composition, "Freedom Suite," a twenty-minute trio piece for tenor, bass, and drums, and revealed his skill as an arranger, giving the piece four distinct themes. Part of its excitement stems from the interplay between Rollins and Roach, which clearly anticipates the avant-garde elasticity of the sixties.

Rollins, an activist before "protest music" became common fare in jazz, wrote a manifesto to accompany the album: "America is deeply rooted in Negro culture: its colloquialisms, its humor, its music. How ironic that the Negro, who more than any other people can claim America's culture as his own, is being persecuted and repressed; that the Negro, who has exemplified the humanities in his very existence, is being rewarded with inhumanity." It is hard to find the precise political meaning of the music itself, but it is clearly less playful than his earlier recordings. Gone are the witty quotations from other tunes and the unexpected shifts of color that Rollins had so often inserted into his playing. The music has a stoic quality, a heroic certitude, and a grand lyricism without being stiff or cold or pretentious. It is a timeless achievement.

Just when Rollins was becoming one of the leading figures in jazz, a new force emerged, in the form of John Coltrane, a tenor player from Philadelphia by way of North Carolina. Coltrane, who also struggled with drugs, was then in the process of leaving the Miles Davis Quintet. After playing with Monk at New York's Five Spot in 1957, Coltrane began to ascend very quickly, startling the jazz world with his innovative harmonic schemes and the complex originality of his phrasing. Before long, people were saying that Rollins had been left behind; he felt the slight profoundly.

"Sonny never found a way to discover how great he really was, and he never recovered from the disapproval of the jazz community when Coltrane was coming up," Branford Marsalis told me. "It's a shame that he never understood that they didn't have the capacity to understand how great he was."

In 1959, Rollins decided to stop performing for a few years, and Lucille helped support him with a secretarial job in the physics department at New York University. Rollins often practiced his horn on the Williamsburg Bridge, pushing himself to play loud enough to compete with the industrial noise of the city. Though he was working earnestly on his music, it was hard to avoid the impression that he had been eclipsed by Coltrane. "You know what happened to Sonny Rollins?" went a joke that circulated in the jazz world at the time. "A 'Trane ran over him."

Even now, Rollins resents that suggestion. "I left the scene to work on some things because I was getting all of this press and I was near the top in the polls, but I wasn't satisfying myself and I didn't feel like I was satisfying the public," he said. "I wanted to work on my horn, I wanted to study more harmony, I wanted to better myself, and I wanted to get out of the environment of all that smoke and alcohol and drugs. In order to avoid disturbing anyone, I went up on the Williamsburg Bridge and practiced."

"What he was playing at the time was so powerful you couldn't believe it," Freddie Hubbard, the great trumpeter, told me. "Other saxophone players were scared of him. He was feared. I played with him and I played with Coltrane, and Sonny was definitely the strongest. He could play so fast you couldn't pat your foot, and then he could double that. Plus, he could keep that big sound going at that tempo, which is impossible. And when he was going at those notes like a tornado, or something like that, each one was right. He wasn't hotfooting along and missing any of those damn chords.

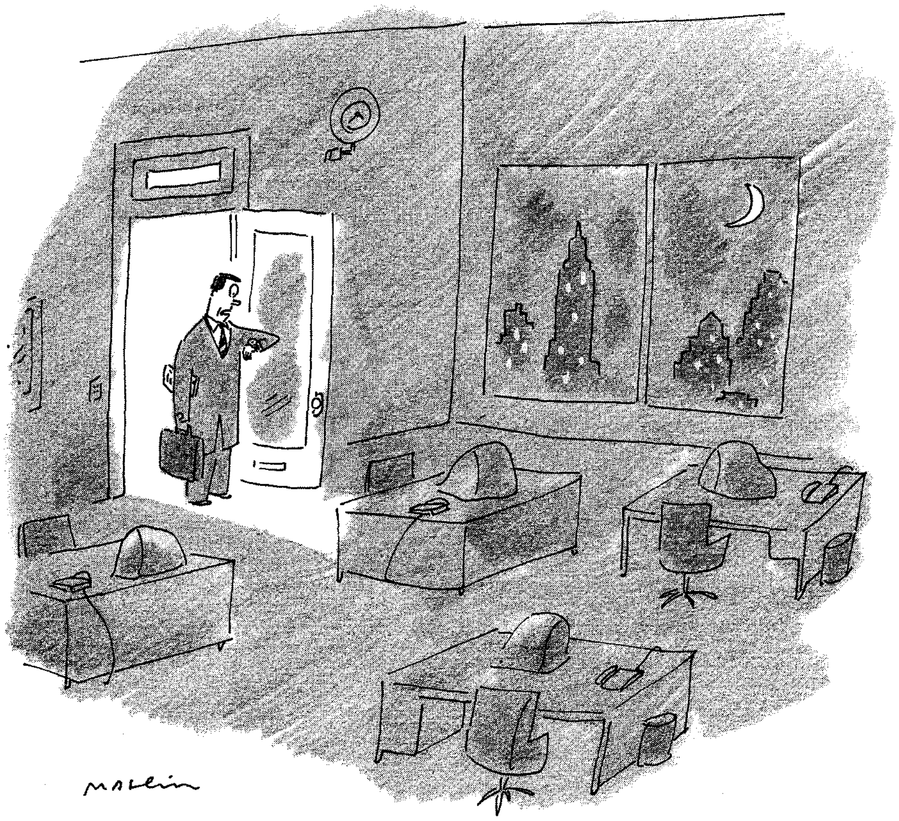
"The difference between him and Coltrane was that Coltrane worked his harmony out very scientifically. He studied Nicolas Slonimsky's 'Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns.' Sonny was different. Spontaneous. There was no fear in him—not of the saxophone, not of the music. He was like Bird, because he wasn't thinking about practicing intervals and scales and all that stuff, like Coltrane. All he needed was a song and he could hear the freedom of the music through his own personality."

Though Rollins and Coltrane were considered rivals by the music community, they admired each other. Hubbard said, "Oh, man, Coltrane loved Sonny. And Sonny loved Coltrane. They didn't talk too much about each other, but whatever they said was always complimentary. But, when I would practice with one of them and then go practice with the other one, they both wanted to know what the other was doing. Both of them were fired up about music, too, because they had both been drug addicts and were trying to make up for the time they lost out in the streets chasing that heroin."

Rollins and Coltrane also had an intellectual kinship, based on shared spiritual concerns. "During the time that I was on the bridge," Rollins recalled, "Coltrane and I were both reading a lot of books about spiritual things—Buddhism, Sufism, and I was into Rosicrucianism. And we talked about music reflecting those disciplines. We were optimistic about things. Coltrane and I would talk about changing the world through music. We thought we might get so good that our music would influence everything around us. I think he stuck to that path, but sometimes I became disconsolate about whether music could change the world. I thought about all the music that Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday, and Art Tatum and all these people played, and how it hadn't had any effect. But now I know that you can uplift people with your music. They can feel bad, and, if you play something, they might feel better. I have to satisfy myself with that kind of contribution."

When Rollins returned to the stage, in late 1961, fronting a band that featured the guitarist Jim Hall, the jazz scene had fractured. Some critics and musicians felt that they were in the midst of a new bebop revolution; others felt that jazz, rather than expanding, was being overthrown in favor of self-indulgence and chaos. Ornette Coleman, a composer and alto saxophonist from Fort Worth, Texas, was considered the most outrageous jazz innovator. Coleman played "free" jazz, which used neither chords nor set tempos. His music, with its floating melodies, idiosyncratic phrasing, and echoes of the blues, was exalted as being primitively profound; it was also dismissed as inept. Then, there was Coltrane's furnace-blast modality. He stacked scales and used few chords, and his music was driven by the dense triplet complexities of the drummer Elvin Jones. Coltrane performed forty-minute solos, and sometimes so exhausted himself that he fell to his knees on the bandstand, still playing.

In contrast to Coleman and Coltrane, Rollins—who now kept his hair close-cropped, and wore tailored suits and tuxedos—was seen as a standard-bearer of convention, and perhaps as the only one who could save jazz. He was hardly comfortable in this role. "I didn't feel like I was there to save anything—I was just ready to play," Rollins said. "The Bridge," his first recording after returning to professional life, documents a luminous moment when



"Damn! I underslept again."

he used superior arrangements, including tempo and metric modulations, saxophone and guitar riffs, and group phrasing that resembled conversation. He hadn't lost his sense of adventure, but it seemed impossible for him to fake the shrieks and screams that characterized the tumultuous avant-garde. He obviously still believed in the many powers of the musical notes, which put him at odds with someone like the late Albert Ayler, a screeching saxophonist who influenced Coltrane. "It's not about notes anymore," Ayler once said. "It's about feelings."

But then Rollins began playing standard songs and his own originals from the nineteen-fifties in the style of Ornette Coleman. "I figured if that kind of playing was valid you could do it on any kind of material, just like every other style," he said. "You didn't need special material. If the conception was valid, the playing should be special enough." Rollins hired two of Coleman's former sidemen, the trumpeter Don Cherry and the drummer Billy Higgins. The music that resulted—the RCA Victor recordings (particularly "Our Man in Jazz"), a series of European bootlegs, and an especially stunning appearance on Italian television—seemed even more daring than what either Coltrane or Coleman was up to at the time. The music, based on split-second shifts in direction, mutated rapidly, sometimes turning a song into a suite, as with "Oleo." Rollins told a European interviewer at the time, "I think I sound like Ornette now." But the band was short-lived. Cherry and Higgins, both of whom were drug addicts, tended to arrive at gigs high. Rollins, who was trying to stay clean, fired them and hired the pianist Paul Bley, who had brought Coleman's approach to the keyboard.

Rollins, meanwhile, was becoming more and more eccentric. Still known as a sharp dresser, in 1963 he started wearing a Mohawk. "The Mohawk, to me, signified a form of social rebellion and it was a nod to the Native American," he said. "I was listening to some Native American music and reading some Native American cultural stuff, and I felt very close to the aboriginal feeling. It made me feel more powerful." Most people thought that the Mohawk made Rollins look both ridiculous and dangerous. A sizable man to begin with, he took up bodybuilding and yoga, grew a thick black mustache, and came to resemble an ominous bouncer. There was a new strangeness to his stage persona as well. At the Five Spot, in 1964, when he wasn't playing to the walls or walking among the tables as he performed, he might come onstage in a cowboy hat and a Lone Ranger mask, with cap pistols strapped on. "Maybe my memories of shows at the Apollo had gotten the best of me," Rollins said sheepishly.

"I'd invite you up, but I'm trying to preserve the crime scene."

While recording for RCA Victor, Rollins produced a number of successful pieces and masterly performances that influenced younger players, such as Pharoah Sanders and Archie Shepp. To some, this creative ingenuity seemed forced. One person who was involved with the RCA recordings has said, "It was almost a tragic period for him. Sonny was really at sea. He didn't know what to do, which way to go. Sonny was absolutely confused by the press, the music community, and everything else. He seemed afraid of being considered old-fashioned. I think the attention that Coltrane was getting and the many who were starting to imitate him made Sonny feel left out, not at the center of things. It was very sad, this tremendous talent turning in circles as he lost more and more confidence. He could do anything he wanted; it was just that he didn't know what to do."

Rollins now admits, "I don't think that Coltrane was thinking about competing with me or had any bad feeling toward me, but I did start to resent him at one point and I feel very embarrassed by that now. When I was up on the bridge and he used to come by my place and see me, we were together. In fact, if I was uptight for money I could get a loan from him, or from Monk, and know that it would never end up in the gossip of the jazz world about how bad off Sonny was. They were real friends. But when I came down from the bridge I think I let his success and the attention that he was receiving get to me. It should never be like that. Never."

By the summer of 1965, Rollins had recovered from his insecurities enough to make the excellent "On Impulse!" Ray

Bryant, who played piano on the album, says that the title was perfect, because Rollins just came into the studio and began playing. "He might say a title and be gone!" Every track is strong. Rollins handles his instrument with the authority that James Joyce attributed to the superior artist, who works with the ease of a god paring his nails. Early in 1966, he recorded the score for the film "Alfie," another triumph. The trumpeter Nicholas Payton says of "Alfie," "Except for Monk, I don't know if anybody else could play with that architecture, except that Sonny was doing it all his own way, which made it an innovation. The title track is actually like a movie being made right in front of you, from start to end, with major characters and minor characters functioning inside a serious plot that takes them here and there, some disappearing and popping up later in a dramatic way. Harmonically, he knew how to play a phrase that never resolves, that hints at something that is never played, but he won't finish the phrase. He creates more and more suspense by playing a series of these phrases, then he'll drop that bomb that brings it all together, that resolves everything. Boom. If you could do something like that and not be noticed, I can understand why some people say Sonny was acting crazy during that period."

Like Louis Armstrong, who always claimed to be nostalgic for the way things were before he became famous, Rollins didn't particularly enjoy the responsibilities of leadership or notoriety. "Well, I'll tell you, I never really liked being a bandleader, because if things didn't sound good all the disappointment fell on me," he said. "At the same time, I couldn't be the real Sonny unless I was leading the band. So it was a riddle that I couldn't solve, and I don't think that I solved it for a long time. Now, even though I still don't really like it, they have my name up there and I have to show up and call the tunes and lead the musicians I've hired to play with me."

In 1969, Rollins retreated again and did not return to the studio or the bandstand until 1971. "I was looking for something spiritual, something that would make sense out of the mess I felt that I was in," he said. "I hated music at the time, because there didn't seem to be enough love between the musicians, not the kind I grew up with. I was sick of the whole thing. The clubs, the travelling—everything meant nothing to me at that time. I went to India, and had no idea whether I would ever play the saxophone professionally again."

By the time Rollins reappeared, things had begun to change once more. Imitating Miles Davis, certain major jazz musicians, such as Freddie Hubbard, Herbie Hancock, and Wayne Shorter, began to embrace rock, or submit to it, or sell out entirely. To the annoyance of many of his fans, Rollins began using electric bass and electric keyboards, while abruptly transforming himself into a rhythm-and-blues player. His recordings were dismal, and he seemed incapable of making a good one. To this day, he hasn't recorded anything that approaches "Saxophone Colossus," "Way Out West," "Freedom Suite," "The Bridge," "On Impulse!," or "Alfie." The late Joe Henderson, whose style was firmly based in the Rollins mode of the early sixties, made recordings in the eighties and nineties that were so much better than his mentor's that uninformed listeners might rank him above Rollins. The formidable jazz drummer Al Foster, who worked with both of them, told me, "Joe always sounded great, but when I was going back and forth between his band and Sonny's I realized that Joe, who could outplay almost everybody, wasn't even close to Sonny. There was no contest. Joe was a master; Sonny is *the* master. But you have to hear him in person to know that."

Until recently, it appeared that Rollins was destined to become a legend whose best work in the last phase of his career would probably go undocumented. Thankfully, this is not to be. Not long ago, I went to Portland, Maine, to see Carl Smith, a collector in his sixties who already has more than three hundred bootleg performances of Rollins—seemingly every session, radio broadcast, nightclub appearance, and concert recorded from 1949 to the present. He is trying to persuade Rollins's label, Milestone Records, to put out the best of them, at no profit to himself. He wants the world to enjoy what he has enjoyed, and he believes that those recordings, properly selected and edited, would not only create a major shift in Rollins's stature but also rejuvenate jazz by showing what a great living improviser can truly do. I agree. The first such album, "Without a Song (The 9/11 Concert)," recorded at a performance in Boston on September 15, 2001, is due out in August.

Sitting in Smith's neat apartment—it has a harbor view—and listening to performance after performance, I came to realize that Rollins is like all truly great players: no matter how well you think they can play, they always exceed your expectations. Smith said that during the bewildering period of the mid-seventies, Rollins "never matched the classics of the fifties." He went on, "The records show that. He seemed to have lost it. Then, in performance at least, he rediscovered himself around 1978. He stood up again, and began to build back up to a kind of ecstatic playing that achieved miraculous heights in the eighties and has sustained itself to this very day."

Over and over, decade after decade, from the late seventies through the eighties and the nineties, there he is, Sonny Rollins, the saxophone colossus, playing somewhere in the world, some afternoon or some eight o'clock somewhere, pursuing the combination of emotion, memory, thought, and aesthetic design with a command that allows him to achieve spontaneous grandiloquence. With its brass body, its pearl-button keys, its mouthpiece, and its cane reed, that horn becomes the vessel for the epic of Rollins's talent and the undimmed power and lore of his jazz ancestors.

"We never really know too much, not really," Rollins told me. "We need to be humble about that. But we do get to know certain things, and we have to do the best with them. Right now, I know what I got from Coleman Hawkins, from Ben Webster, from Dexter Gordon, from Don Byas, from Charlie Parker, and all the other guys who gave their lives to this music. I know that without a doubt. From childhood, I've known this. All the way from back then, when it was coming out of the windows, when it was on the stage at the Apollo, when it was on the new records coming out. So now, after all these years, it's pretty clear to me, finally. All I want to do is stand up for them, and for the music, and for what they inspired in me. I'm going to play as long as I can. I want to do that as long as I can pick up that horn and represent this music with honor. That's all it's about, as far as I can see. I don't know anything else, but I know that." ♦

FICTION

ALONG THE HIGHWAYS

BY NICK ARVIN

The two people inside the convertible—the combination of the two of them together—had the appearance of an illusion. Graham switched lanes to follow them through a left turn. The top was down, and he watched the mouth of the driver, Doug, open and close, and watched the passenger, Lindsey, nod and laugh. The wind fidgeted with her hair, and her gaze lingered on Doug's opening and closing face with warm, inexplicable intimacy. For the first several miles, Graham pursued them through the crowded, car-clogged suburbs of Detroit only to corroborate what he was seeing, to verify his sanity.

Graham had been going home after a late, solitary lunch, returning without hurry to an empty apartment. He preferred to do things in an unhurried way, not out of any particular philosophy but because hurry was to him unseemly. He had studied computer science in college, and he liked the work that had followed, because he could sit at a computer and develop and debug code, while everything disappeared for eight or ten or twelve hours. It pleased him that a day could be got through so neatly. He liked things to be tidy. His apartment was furnished with fine, clean things that he had purchased from the catalogues he stored in stainless-steel racks beside his toilet. He liked to dress better than those around him—not difficult in his profession—and he liked to drink better beer and wine, to eat better cheese. He liked not to flaunt these things but to enjoy them privately and enjoy their betterness.

He was thin and bald, and sometimes (but not now, in the car) he wore a brown felt fedora with a silk band which he had found in his grandfather's attic. He knew it was anachronistic and perhaps made him look a little eccentric, but it covered his baldness, about which he was self-conscious.

He had always been socially awkward. Much of life seemed to happen at a kind of observational remove from him. Only uncertainty consistently expressed itself directly.

The convertible was a no-longer-new forest-green Mustang with a bumper sticker that said "Buckle Up! It Makes It Harder for the Aliens to Suck You Out." Doug was driving, and this was normal, because the convertible was Doug's. Doug was a big, affable, bearded man with a pouchy stomach; in time, inevitably, he would come to resemble a Santa Claus. Sometimes people called him Doug Dog, or Dougie Dog-Dog, or another variation. He was Graham's friend, and Graham had often seen him in this convertible.

The surprising thing was Lindsey's presence in the passenger seat. As they passed chain restaurants and warehouse-style stores scattered like islands in parking-lot seas, Graham watched Doug stop at a light, reach out, and put his arm around Lindsey. She turned and leaned toward him. Doug kissed her briefly, casually, on the forehead.

"Oh," Graham said. He removed his hands from the steering wheel and gripped the armrests on either side of him. Then the light changed, and he took hold of the steering wheel again.

He followed them onto northbound I-75, staying at a distance, trying to keep a couple of cars between himself and the convertible. The afternoon traffic was thick with weekenders, vehicles pulling boats, Jet Skis, dirt bikes. For a few miles, Graham hid behind a tall, white, box-shaped R.V., popping out now and again to check for Doug's car, until the R.V. proved to be too slow and he had to pass. The radio station he was listening to grew fussy with static, and he switched it off.

Lindsey had been married to Graham's brother, Franklin. Graham and Franklin had been born less than a year apart; every April there was a week and a half during which they were the same age. As boys, they were sometimes taken for twins, although in adolescence Franklin grew both taller and fatter. Over the years, Graham had never lived more than a few miles from Franklin. Graham programmed computers; Franklin sold computers. Their relationship had been a quiet, calm one; neither of them was inclined by nature or upbringing to loud displays of emotion, although Graham had to acknowledge that Franklin tended to be a little more at ease in a conversation than he was. After Franklin married, they had grown apart slightly—Graham had understood that Franklin needed to make Lindsey his priority. But he regularly visited Franklin and Lindsey at home, to watch a ballgame, say, or a movie, or perhaps to help with painting a room or digging postholes for a garden fence. Lindsey had usually sent Graham home with food in his hands—a loaf of zucchini bread, a casserole in Tupperware. On summer weekends, the three of them had sometimes driven together to Lindsey's parents' place on a lake up north, Graham napping in the back seat with his hat pulled down over his eyes, thinking of the sound of the water under the little wooden pier, the slow chug of the aluminum-hulled bass boat. He liked the companionship of the ride nearly as much as being at the lake. Once when he was walking across the lawn to the cottage with Lindsey, she had taken him by the hand. "I'm glad Franklin has you for a brother. You're very important to him," she'd said. Graham had appreciated the gesture; she understood, he thought, that he and Franklin were unlikely to express such sentiments directly. He also sensed, in the thought behind the gesture, her own fondness for him. It occurred to him that if Franklin had not met her first he might have liked to marry Lindsey himself.

One day, Franklin began complaining of headaches. An MRI revealed a tumor the size and shape of the mouse that Graham gripped and clicked each day at work. Two weeks later, while everyone was still talking about how he could beat this thing, Franklin entered a coma, and with tubes in his nose and arms, his head shaved bald and stitched like a baseball, he quickly slipped through the coma down into death.

When Graham left the hospital for the last time, he felt as if a city inside him had been destroyed by an enormous silent conflagration, leaving a landscape of ash, char, and teetering half-structures. He spent the rest of the day drinking cheap gin alone, not stirring from his sofa except to go to the bathroom. But even as he sat with his gin the behavior seemed absurd to him. Alcohol never brought him any satisfaction, only the feeling of his skull contracting a little too snugly around his brain.

Looking back, he had a sense that his public response to his brother's death had been inadequate. Somehow he had never managed to tell anyone at work that his brother had died. He had not cried. He had told Doug about Franklin's passing the day after it happened, and Doug had said, "I'm really sorry." He

JAMES ROSENQUIST, "ULTRA-VIOLET CARS" (1966) / LEO CASTELLI/VAGA

had waited, as if expecting Graham to say more, but, while various thoughts turned slowly in Graham's head, none urged expression. A week later, Doug asked intently, "How are you doing?" Graham said he was O.K. He hadn't been thinking of his brother right then, and when Doug's real meaning occurred to him, a minute later, it seemed awkward to circle back.

Several weeks had passed before Graham arrived at Lindsey's house—no longer Franklin and Lindsey's house—with a bouquet, determined to express himself on one thing at least. Lindsey smiled, said, "Thank you, Graham." She carried the flowers to the kitchen sink to cut the stems. The kitchen carpet was khaki-colored and knobbly, the kitchen table was made of big, scarred pieces of wood; it was all just as it had been when Franklin was alive. She did not keep a very neat kitchen—dishes were mounded in the sink, and scraps littered the cutting board on the counter—but Graham tried not to notice. "It's hard to believe," he said, "that Franklin won't come downstairs any minute and offer a drink."

"Would you like a drink?"

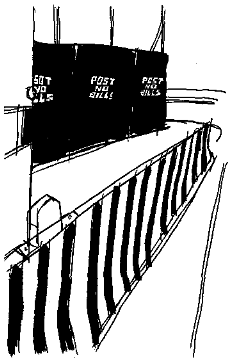
"No. Not really."

"You'd like Franklin to be here to offer you one."

"Yes."

"It's unbelievable, isn't it?" she said. "I still can't believe it."

They talked for a while of Graham's mother, who had fainted during the funeral; of the funeral-home director's crooked teeth; of a cousin's car that had overheated during the procession; of the weather, which was unseasonably cool. Lindsey had a short neck capped by a little head and a swarm of thick, curly hair. When she was sitting, her belly puffed into a small pillow between her breasts and her waist. Her eyes were dark and serious. Graham thought that one could say she was cute. She had a lovely, if somewhat reluctant, smile. Graham had learned to watch the corners of her eyes, which smiled more readily.



A silence filled the room. Lindsey gazed at the windows. Graham said, "You know I would like to help you any way that I can."

"He was your brother. It must be awful for you, too, Graham."

"It is awful. The surprise, the suddenness, is what's terrible."

"No," she said. "The worst part of it is just that he's gone."

They were silent a minute more, and he watched her gaze settle ponderously to the floor. "Lindsey," he said, "I want you to know, I—I've always liked you, very much." Her attention on him was expressionless. He regarded his own bumbling with a sense of scorn and regret. It was appalling that he had made it this far into his thirties without ever learning to talk. He leaned a little further forward, pulled his hands off his knees and opened them, trying to fill the space of his hesitation. "Not now, of course, but maybe, after a while, we could spend some time together and—see." Her gaze gave him nothing, neither encouragement nor warning. A tightening inside made him take a deep breath. He put his hands on his knees again and pushed himself back into his seat. "I'm sorry," he said. "I shouldn't have brought this up. Not now." He felt absurd.

Lindsey smiled, very slightly. "It's all right," she said. "Not now. Perhaps later."

That was all she said, but it gave him hope. He left the house with his fedora in one hand, optimism gripped firmly in the other. He began plotting the future. He thought he should allow four months to pass after his brother's death, then contact her to suggest a lunch. Then there would be further occasional, friendly meetings, and after another three or four months he would make his intentions more explicit. He believed that they might be married another year after that. He surveyed this plan nervously, admitted the possibility of future adjustments. But he felt that she liked him. When he examined his chances of success as objectively as possible, he thought they were good to excellent.

Graham had followed them out of the Detroit suburbs and halfway to Flint, and he felt sure that they were going to Lindsey's family's cottage on the lake. They took the I-475 loop through the silent smokestacks, the rusting buildings, and the empty, pitted concrete parking lots of Flint. North of the city, rejoining I-75, they were again amid open fields and trees. Billboards approached at regular intervals, like incoming waves. Traffic moved at eighty miles per hour. Graham no longer made any attempt to hide from view. He felt aggrieved and bewildered. He knew that Doug had met Lindsey once or twice, but that they should be together in Doug's car was bizarre, more or less inexplicable within the parameters of their relationship as Graham knew it. Franklin, Lindsey, and Doug—these were the most important people in Graham's life, and it was inevitable that they had met. But Graham had certainly never noticed any significant interaction between Doug and Lindsey. The only event he could recall clearly was a party at Lindsey and Franklin's, where Doug had drunk too much and spilled most of a glass of beer over some woman's blouse.

Nonetheless, when Graham's cell phone rang and he saw Doug's number on the display, he suffered the guilt of a voyeur discovered. "Hello?" he said, trying to sound as if he did not know who could be calling.

"Graham."

"Doug?"

"That you back there?"

"Behind you?"

"Yes?"

Graham said, "Well, I don't know. I mean—I guess so, Doug."

Several seconds went by. Both cars flickered through the brief concrete darkness below an overpass. Finally, Graham said, "Is that Lindsey up there with you?"

"Yeah. She is."

"She's with— It is Lindsey, my brother's wife?"

"Franklin's widow."

"Franklin— Well. He hasn't been dead very long, Doug. I mean—"

"Graham, I'm sorry. This is pretty awkward."

Graham coughed. After a moment, he hung up. It occurred to Graham that he had always despised Doug a little. Doug was one of those people who would laugh without even having heard the joke, only to please, to signal his harmony with the group. Doug Doggy. He was the kind of guy people called Doggy-Dog Doug, and he smiled, pleased to be noticed at all. Graham thought Franklin would have hated the idea of Lindsey with someone like Doug.

Brake lights flashed ahead. Doug slowed, and Graham slowed behind him. Traffic trickled forward, then stopped. They sat becalmed. When movement resumed, it was the crawl, stop, crawl, stop of some exhausted creature.

Graham dialled Lindsey's cell phone. "Lindsey," he said.

"I don't know what to say."

"Lindsey," he said. "I am a little, I guess, confused. I thought you understood—I mean, I hoped we might talk, you see. I am surprised. Do you know what I'm talking about?"

"I guess so," she said. Then, "Not exactly."

"You said— Well," Graham cleared his throat. "I think you said, 'Not now. Maybe later.' "

"Did I say that? I was being polite, Graham. Your brother had died. My husband. I didn't know what to say."

Graham saw her run her hand through her hair. "I kind of thought," he said, "we were—we always got along awfully well."

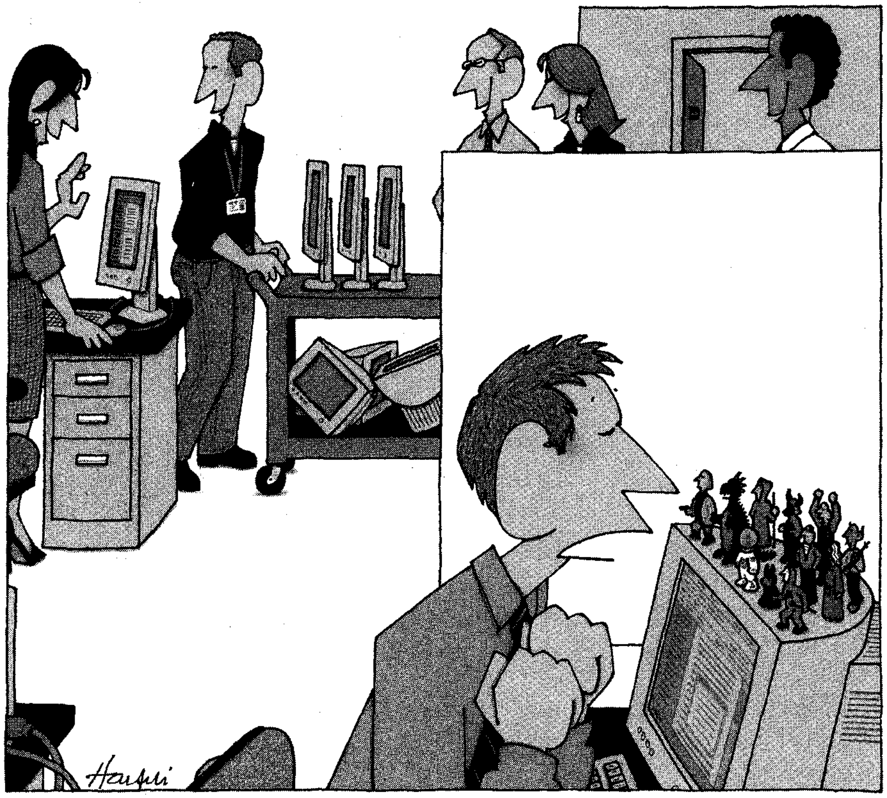
"You thought, between us, a relationship?" she asked. "Between us, a relationship was always going to be a mistake. Don't you feel that?"

"Because of Franklin?"

"Yes. Sure. Because of him." Clutching her cell phone like an earache, she twisted to look back at him. "This, anyway, is where we are."

Traffic had stopped again. He could have opened the window and shouted to her. He could have got out and walked up to the convertible and screamed in their faces, slapped them, spat, wept upon them. He looked at her looking back at him. Traffic eased forward, accelerated a little. Along the shoulder ran a series of black tire fragments like abandoned carcasses, torn ends exposing claws of steel wire. "But," Graham said, "how did this happen?"

"Doug called to offer his condolences, that's all. We ended up going to get a drink."



"I'm going to have to let some of you go."

• •

"He asked you out for a beer?"

"I don't recall who asked who. I think me. I think I said, 'I need a drink.' Is that right?" Graham heard Doug's voice, muffled and beaten by the wind, faintly through the phone. "He says yes. That's right."

"I see."

"Anyway, Graham."

"Yes."

"Oh, Graham. I don't know what to tell you."

"All right." His foot moved from brake to accelerator to brake. "But I guess— Are you going to the cottage?"

"For the weekend."

"O.K. I mean, I thought so."

She said nothing. He said, "Bye." He hung up. He thought he should do something other than drive, but what that might be eluded him. He had not realized the absurd heights to which his hopes had stacked themselves. He had always arranged his life so as to protect himself from the shock of disappointment, but now it seemed that his hopes and everything else he knew lay around him in wreckage.

Traffic funnelled to the left of a lane closure and finally resumed a steady speed. Orange barrels flashed by, guarding the moving traffic from a series of abandoned yellow machines. Graham began to look for the next exit, a ramp up and an overpass and another ramp down into the southbound lanes, toward home. He thought of his apartment, of taking off his shoes at the door, as he always did, to pad around in the open empty quiet on the wood floors, the shades drawn against the sky, which would be dimming into dusk by the time he got there, the computer humming and glowing, the television echoing slightly in the barrenness. He thought of passing the weekend there, of the time spent in a dull, achy, ineffectual state of regret and obsession over lost moments and missed cues. He thought of the white walls, the quiet, the regrets turning around and around on themselves.

Then the construction zone was behind him somewhere, and he couldn't recall when he had left it. He saw an off-ramp ahead and watched it approach and watched it pass by. Several miles on, there was another, decorated with lollipop signage on tall poles, and he let that one go by, too.

Doug called. "So," he said.

Graham said, "Hi, Doug."

"What are you doing?"

"I don't know."

"Graham, you should go home, get a drink. Get a beverage and some sleep."

"I don't know, Doug. What— Really, I don't want to go home, I think."

"You kind of have to, don't you, eventually?"

Graham made no response to this. Doug said, "Well, think about it."

There were three different exits that might have taken Doug and Lindsey west to the lake, but soon they had passed all of these, and between exits now there was little to see but thick brush and trees along either side of the roadway. Graham phoned Doug. "Are you—I guess I thought you were going to the lake."

"We were."

"Are Lindsey's parents there?"

"Yes."

"You've met her parents?"

"I was going to."

Graham smoothed his tie. "Well, where are you going now?"

"I'm not sure. Graham, you're kind of making us nervous. What are you going to do?"

"I don't know." Inspired, he edged a few feet closer to their car. "I don't know. I was just following. I guess maybe I'll just follow you."

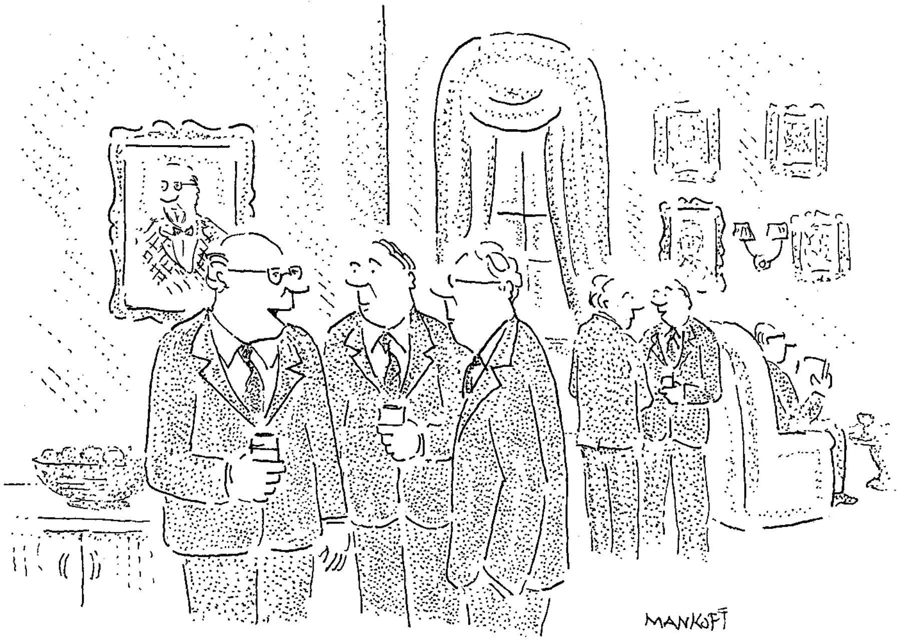
Now Doug hung up on him. Graham pulled off his tie, dropped it behind his seat, opened his collar button. In Mackinaw City, Doug took an off-ramp, and Graham followed him into the streets. Doug accelerated and, reaching an intersection on a yellow light, spun a right turn. Graham, who was lagging behind, pressed the gas and hit the intersection under a red light, then braked hard and turned, his tires crying out. He got around the corner just in front of the traffic that had begun to cross. These cars braked and honked, and Graham sped away from them. He saw with only the corner of his vision that he was passing Doug, who had stopped at a gas station.

Cursing, Graham made a U-turn and darted back through traffic. He parked on the opposite side of a gas pump from Doug. "Hey," Doug said as Graham got out of his car. Lindsey sat stiffly, facing forward in her seat. Doug twisted open the cap on his gas tank. Graham, with a sensation of unnatural dignity, moved through the tasks of putting his credit card into the pump and filling his own car with gasoline.

"Are you getting tired of this yet?" Doug called. Graham did not answer. Doug extracted a dripping squeegee from the bucket on the canopy post and pushed it over his windshield. Graham went inside the station and bought a can of soda and a bag of pretzels, watching Doug through the window as he did so. Lindsey roused herself and came in to use the bathroom. She did not look at Graham. Graham went to the bathroom, too, hurriedly. When he came out, Lindsey had not yet returned. He got into his car, looked uneasily in the mirror, and was both mollified and slightly disoriented by the sight of his own familiar features. Lindsey came out chewing on a chocolate bar, and Graham followed them back to the interstate.

By the time they were moving between the great white towers and green cables of the Mackinac Bridge, the sun had already melted into Lake Michigan. A pair of lavender airplane contrails ran along the twilight horizon. The roads were free now of weekend traffic, and the few scattered souls still travelling were marked by headlamps. Off the bridge, Doug turned west onto U.S. 2, a two-lane highway that ran along the lakeshore. The water could not be seen in the nighttime dark, but when the trees opened the lake was implied by a vast, indefinite nothingness. Doug phoned, and in quiet tones said, "What are you doing, why don't you turn back?" and Graham said, "I don't know, I don't know. Why don't you turn back?" The phones lost signal and the call was dropped. Graham flexed his fingers on the steering wheel. He had begun to feel a foggy gap between his intentions and his actions. It was unclear to him whether he was behaving like himself or out of some idea of how an angry man ought to behave. He wanted to examine his feelings, his desires, but as he tried to take them up they moved away. It was easy enough to keep driving.

Both cars skimmed westward through Michigan's Upper Peninsula, through an empty dark country of defunct iron and copper mines, leaving the lake behind. They passed under three stoplights in Iron Mountain, spun across a bridge swathed by the muddy smell of a river, and past a sign welcoming the motoring public to the state of Wisconsin. There was a stop for Doug and Lindsey to change places, and another for more gas. Graham realized



"I'll start thinking outside the box when the box is empty."

that Doug's convertible would always run out of gas before his own little coupe did.

Around 2 A.M., Graham took the measure of his exhaustion and found it was significant. An hour later, growing desperate, he turned the radio up very loud and shouted along with the choruses of unfamiliar country songs. He tried opening all the windows, pinched himself, held up his eyelids with his fingertips. He slapped himself. The pain startled his mind open for a few minutes, but then he saw shapes gathering in the corners of his vision. These floated forward like meaningless amoebas, but with study became household furniture, desert landscapes, rooms filled with people he had known as a boy. He bit his tongue and saw the road again. The glowing blue digits on the radio said 4:07. When had he last been up this late? College, a decade ago. He turned the radio up higher still. He plucked from the back of his head a dozen hairs, one by one. He recited state capitals and calculated square roots. He extracted a foil gum wrapper from the cup holder in the armrest and chewed it. He screamed until he was hoarse. He dug his fingernails into the palms of his hands. And for a brief time he drove in a waking dream state, dreaming of driving, and dreaming of dreaming of driving. Through this, he held on to the need to follow the twin red lights ahead.

Under a dark-blue dawn sky they entered the state of Minnesota. Doug was in the driver's seat, scratching in his beard. Graham realized, with a sense of disquiet, that he could not recall when Doug had returned to the driver's position. A couple of stops had occurred in the late hours that he could remember only as figures and lights in a churning, murky water. His teeth felt moldy under his tongue, and on his skin and hair was the oily film that his body had been excreting all night. He took some Kleenex from a box in the back seat, moistened the tissue with his tongue, and wiped at his face. He saw that, from a certain perspective, he had made himself ridiculous, and he wondered again whether he was doing what he wanted to be doing or not. At times he kept driving only because to stop seemed even more preposterous than to continue. It irritated him that Doug and Lindsey had not yet done something to extricate them all from this.

They flitted through the structures and homes of Duluth and plunged again into the forests. Occasionally, they crossed a stream or skirted the edge of a small lake. Graham drove with the windows down, the wind turbulent around him. He thought he heard the weird cry of a loon. He realized that he didn't feel tired anymore. The return of the sun had been a great relief; his senses revived in accord with the light.

Doug phoned again. "Let's stop this, man. You've made your point."

"Huh." Then, "Doug, what is my point?"

"I don't know, Graham. Do you?"

"I do what?"

"Know the point."

After a few seconds, Graham said, "Doug. Dougie Dog-Dog." He stopped himself from continuing on this theme. "I'm not sure I would call it a point."

"Not a point."

"Something else, maybe," he said. He yawned. "I'm having a little trouble, Doug, thinking things through, words. It's possible I'm a little tired, to be honest."

"Don't fade on me now, Graham. Let's get back to the point."

"Yes, the point."

"There isn't one."

"No."

"There is maybe something else."

"Yes."

"Let's work on that."

"All right."

"What do you hope for here, Graham? What good can come of following us around like this?"

"Well, Doug," Graham said, "why do you keep driving? What I mean is, stop at a hotel. Get a room. Lock the door."

"Will you be outside waiting?"

"Maybe. Probably. Yeah."

Doug said, "Don't be an idiot."

"Uh-huh." After a moment, Graham added, "I think we've just said— I don't think we have any more things to say to each other."

Doug sighed. "Fine." He hung up.

After another fifty miles, the ring of the phone startled Graham. He expected Doug, but the voice was Lind-

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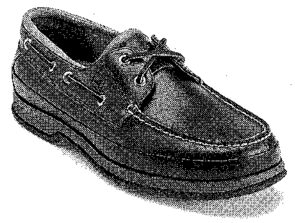

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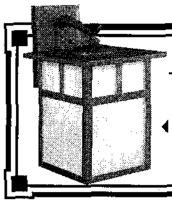

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sey's. "Don't hit the raccoon," she said.

A dead, crushed thing appeared in the road, and Graham steered around it.

"I don't understand this," Lindsey said. "I don't understand what you're doing. You don't behave like this. You're always so sweet, Graham."

Sweet. He did not respond but only stared and accelerated a little closer. He thought of sweet things: a gumball, a cream puff, a sucker.

"Are you there?" she asked.

"Yes."

She said nothing for several seconds. Then, "Oh, Graham."

"Lindsey, I think I'd rather— Please don't call me sweet."

Lindsey said, "I don't understand what you hope to do."

Graham stared at Doug's car. "I want you to know I'm here," he said.

"I was just thinking of Franklin," she said. "And to be honest, Graham"—the top of the convertible was up now, and he could not see her, but he imagined she was wagging a finger in the air—"you're not Franklin. You're not as interesting, not as friendly, not as smart. You're nice, but kind of dull and hard to talk to."

"I dress better."

"You look ludicrous. That hat?" She paused, said, "I'm sorry. I'm dead tired."

"I—I loved Franklin." He punched his fist into his thigh. He felt savage and utterly ineffectual.

"I did, too. And I told him so."

He hung up on her.

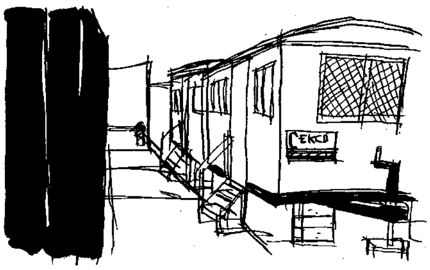
In North Dakota, great spaces opened. Silos towered like monuments amid languid hills. Doug slowed to obey the speed limit as they passed through weather-beaten single-stoplight villages. They got fuel at gas pumps with numbers that scrolled up on wheels. The widowed sister-in-law and the ex-friend once again changed seats. Graham wanted badly to use the bathroom, but did not dare for fear that the convertible would vanish. Doug, driving now, pulled into the road, and Graham followed. He took an empty plastic cup from the passenger seat and steered with a knee while using his hands to hold the cup and open his trousers. A curve forced him to grab for the steering wheel, spilling half the cup. For a minute, he held the remainder, the plastic warm and slick in his fingers, then he set the thing into a cup holder over the radio.

For the next hundred miles or so, he drove with the leg of his pants slowly drying against his thigh. In the plains stood small, fast-spinning windmills with dark-brown cattle gathered at their feet. At times, his mind wheeled around in vast, galactic, circular arguments as he explained his predicament to himself. He rubbed his face; his eyeballs felt like rotten plums. Black and gray storm heads bloomed over the fields to the north, but above the road the sky remained clear. When the phone rang, he did not answer it. The fuel needle crept always toward empty. His thoughts began to move into strange avenues and passages—of melting roadways and painted faces and endless limbs and white skies.

When he next considered carefully the details of the world, dusk had come again. In the darkness to his right a few tiny lamps floated, like lost children with flashlights.

Doug drove faster, well above the speed limit, and his car dwindled into the distance. Graham accelerated to close in. Then he edged closer. And closer yet. Soon he was driving only three or four feet from Doug's bumper, his headlamps starkly lighting the backs of their heads. Doug glanced over his shoulder, and the lights caught his eyes, turning them into shining, startled objects. Graham's phone began to ring, and he left it lying on the seat. He read, and reread, and reread "Buckle Up! It Makes It Harder for the Aliens to Suck You Out." He hated Doug. He reached for the cup in the cup holder and brought it to his lips before recalling that it contained urine. What am I doing? he wondered. What am I doing? The question seemed to have crept into his mind like a child into his parents' bedroom. He banished it and closed the door.

He thought of Franklin. Of sitting with him, just sitting in the same room with him, his brother.



He thought, Ah, God!

The road swam and shivered occasionally before him, but he followed it. Doug's turn signal flashed, and they veered onto a side road. They turned, drove, turned, turned again. Graham felt as if he existed not at the front of his eyeballs looking out but at some point behind, so that the facts of the world got in and then had a gap in which to ricochet and echo.

They drove through a moonless darkness on a narrow road. He tried to recall whether he was chasing them or following. Time passed.

He noticed that he was running low on gas. Was that possible? Had there been another stop recently? He might have slept briefly and dreamed of driving while Doug pumped gas. He could not say what he had done.

Then Doug pulled onto the shoulder. Graham went by slowly and idled ahead perhaps a hundred yards before he stopped. There had been no other traffic for many miles.

The convertible's lights went off. Several minutes later, Graham's phone rang. Graham said into the phone, "Why are we stopping here?"

"My car is out of gas," Doug said.

In the rearview mirror he saw the figures of Doug and Lindsey coming up behind him, shadowy and red-lit by his tail lamps. Graham made a fretful attempt to hide the mess in his car, sweeping rubbish from the seats down into the foot wells. He bent to pull his socks up from where they had collapsed around his ankles. He said into the phone, "You need gas?"

"I have no idea where we are."

"No. Well, me either."

Doug stood outside his window. Some tiny fraction of the instinct of friendship revived at the sight of Doug's pale, bearded face, and Graham smiled at him. Doug, with the phone still held to his ear, said, "Get out, Graham."

"Why?"

"I'm tired," Doug said.

"Gosh. Tired."

"Get out." Doug dropped his phone and with his face an inch from Graham's window he yelled, "Get out! Get out! Get out!"

Graham, confused, pushed the door

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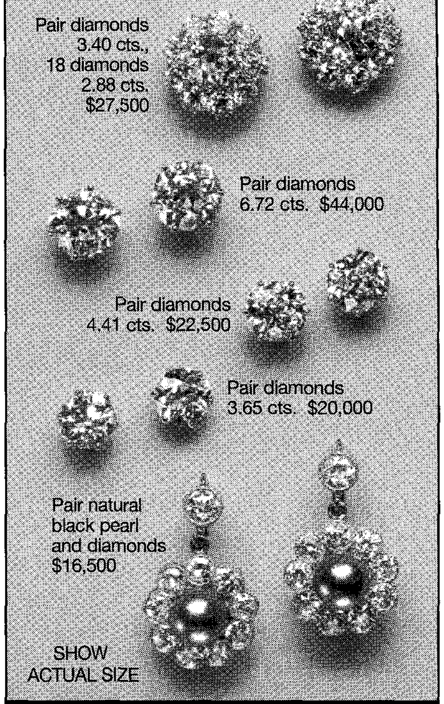

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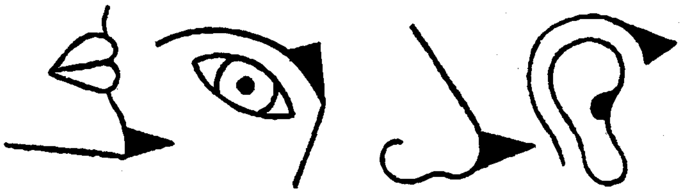


DANCING

SPRING STEPS

Three great seasons in one month.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

Last month, New York's dance audience was offered something it isn't used to anymore: a bonanza. First came the Martha Graham Dance Company, at City Center. The Graham troupe is still recovering from the terrible period it went through in the nineteen-eighties and nineties—that is, just before and after Graham's death, in 1991, at the late and unwatchful age of ninety-six. During that time, the dancers went in for near-comical overacting. Now they are calming down. This season, Elizabeth Auclair, as the virgin in "Primitive Mysteries" (1931), really acted like a virgin. Fang-Yi Sheu, who has become more or less the star of the company, led "Sketches from Chronicle" (1936) with titanic strength and not an ounce of look-at-me theatrics.

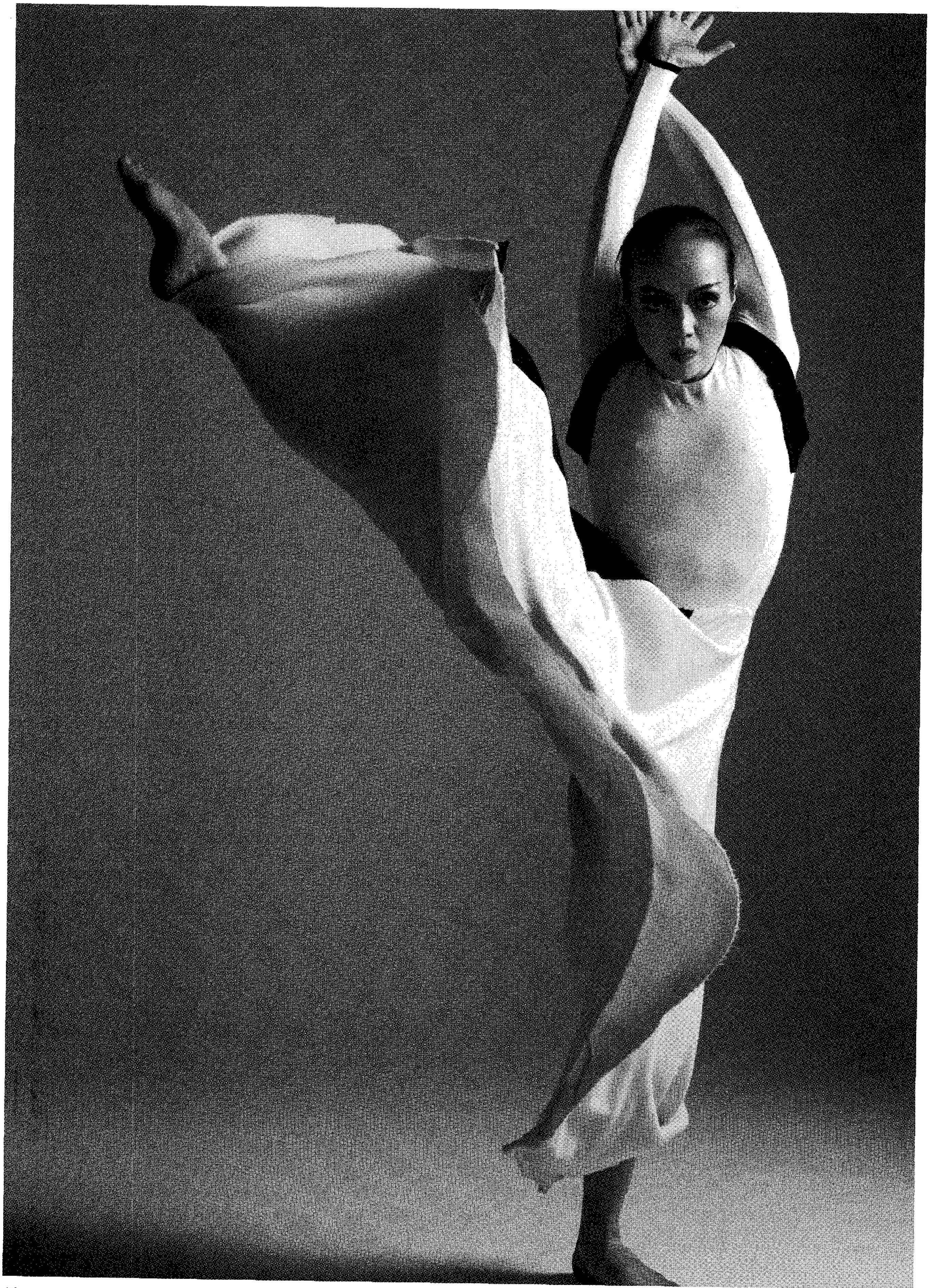
Some dancers, especially the senior ones, have not given up the heart-attack style of performing. I thought that Virginie Mécène, as the bride in "Appalachian Spring," was going to have to be taken to the emergency room before the piece was over. Some of the younger dancers also chew the scenery now and then, but a change is clearly under way. As a token of it, one could see very distinctly this season how hard Graham's technique is. Bourrées on the knees, jackknife turns, hinge falls (in which the dancer drops her upper body backward, onto the floor, while her legs, from knee to foot, remain standing): these are stock-in-trade in Graham's choreography. But never, recently, have they stood out so clearly, which means either that the company is finally doing them again or that they are no longer being obscured by onstage hysterics. The acting should be in the steps. That's where Graham put it, and, slowly, slowly, it is coming back home.

The directors of the Graham troupe are now faced with the problem of any dance organization whose founder has died. How do they develop the repertory, keep it growing? This year, they commissioned a piece from Martha Clarke, a logical choice. She studied the Graham technique when she was young, and she specializes in hot-blooded dance-dramas, as did Graham. Clarke often bases her pieces on famous works of art, and in "Sueño," her creation for the Grahamites, she did so again. The piece is derived from Goya's "Los Caprichos," complete with the hunchback and the hanged man, and the shadowy palette. Basically, what happens in the dance is that the women throw themselves into the arms of the men, who then twirl them violently in the air. This is striking visually—the unfurling skirts, the flying hair—and not without emotional, or at least sexual, force. (Sadomasochism often bumps up in Clarke's work.) "Sueño" goes absolutely nowhere, however. Near the end, the hanged man is hanged, but then he gets better, and the couples twirl some more. At the same time, the piece, like so much of Clarke's work, is highly atmospheric, and the dancers seem to love doing it. The company should tap Clarke again, and ask her for a dance with a story in it.

Another way to refresh the repertory is to bring out works from the back of the closet, and the company did this, too. The big revival of the season was "Deaths and Entrances," Graham's piece about the Brontë sisters. From what I have read, no one who saw this work at its première, in 1943, had the foggiest notion what it was about, and sixty years later the situation is much the same. The three sisters storm around, undergoing abdominal contractions. In between, they handle enigmatic props: a cup, a shell, and two chess pieces that look like dildoes. This is probably supposed to tell us something about the artistic endeavor. I think it tells us more about Graham's interest in Jungian psychology. But Miki Orihara's stone-faced and wild-bodied interpretation of the lead role (originally Graham's role), together with Tadej Brdnik's touching portrayal of the so-called Poetic Beloved, got you through the forty-two-minute piece and, in the process, seemed to promise that the troupe is now approaching even the toughest material with a fresh mind.

Then came the Mark Morris Dance Group, at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. The program opened with a dance, "From Old Seville," that has been performed only a few times. So for most of the audience this was a première, and it was heaven. Morris was one of the greatest dancers this country ever produced. Today, he performs rarely, and that is probably as it should be. He is forty-eight and has a hard enough job directing his company and supplying it with new work. Furthermore, his style of performing is different from his dancers'—more deadpan, more ironical—so it is confusing to watch him alongside them. Nevertheless, Morris, to many people, is not just a choreographer. He is a "personality," and they want to see him on the stage. In "From Old Seville," they did.

The piece takes place in a bar. A blasé-looking woman (Lauren Grant) walks in and orders a drink. Then an even wearier man (Morris) enters and throws back a shot, after which the two move to the center of the stage and—all weariness forgotten—do a fiery *escuela bolero* routine, with castanets. That goes on for a minute or so; then they amble back to the bar. This happens four times, with Morris, if not Grant, clearly more drawn to the bar than to the dance. When he is dancing, however, he is an utter dynamo, his footwork thrillingly speedy and precise. (Morris spent half a year in Spain studying fla-



Fang-Yi Sheu: one could see distinctly this season how hard Martha Graham's technique is. Photograph by Max Vadukul.

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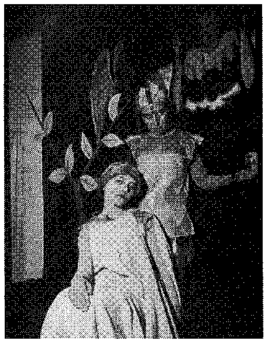

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menco as a teen-ager.) That back-and-forth of tone makes the dance extremely funny, as does the physical contrast between Morris, who is almost six feet tall, and Grant, who is less than five feet, but who doesn't yield an inch to this big lunk. "From Old Seville" is a party piece. Morris should do more of them.

The one really new work of the season was "Rock of Ages," set to Schubert's "Notturno" for piano trio. This is what I would call one of Morris's "music pieces." He makes them often these days—dances in which he seems to let the music remain in the forefront, only commented upon by the dancing. "Rock of Ages" is fundamentally an arm dance, and Morris, as is his practice, sets up certain recurring movement themes. The four dancers reach their arms out, as if surveying the land; they put their hands to their faces, as if to hide tears; they raise their arms to the sky, with a bent palm (a famous movement from Balanchine's "Serenade"). Meanwhile, the music surges up from the pit, and the dancers' actions seem a kind of oblique reflection of its mystery and poignance. In one piercing moment a man puts his arms out sideways and a woman stretches her arms across his at a ninety-degree angle. You are moved, and you don't know why. One reason, of course, is the modesty of the action (*contra* Graham) in contrast to the plangency of the Schubert Adagio. But that effect should last only a few, postmodern minutes. Morris's "music dances" stay in the mind much longer, and I think that's because of the inherently tragic confrontation between the body, so vulnerable and earthbound, and the music, soaring and free.

Concurrently with the Graham season, an Indian group called the Nrityagram Dance Ensemble appeared at the Joyce. Though it is based near Bangalore, in southern India, Nrityagram specializes in *odissi*, a style native to the east. And that's not the only way in which the troupe is "inauthentic." Many Indian dancers these days try to reproduce the routines done by temple dancers in times past, but Surupa Sen, Nrityagram's artistic director, choreographs what are frankly new works, in the *odissi* vocabulary.

It is hard to describe the excitement of these dances. As the lights went up on the first number, we saw two women, one in gleaming turquoise, the other in saffron, poised in stylized flight. The spotlight then shifted to a figure in red, Bijayini Satpathy. In this piece and in the others, all the dancers gave a hundred per cent, and Satpathy gave three hundred per cent. You couldn't believe what you were seeing—dancing so rich, so deep-diving.

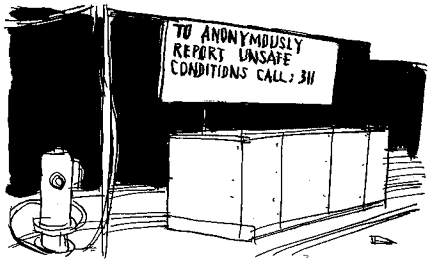
Nrityagram's technical achievement is exceedingly high. The dancers can stand on one leg for what seems like five minutes. They can bend their hands back as if they had no bones. But the technique is just the foundation. What is so impressive is Sen's choreography. *Odissi*, like all classic improvisational forms, was originally solo dancing. Sen wants to do ensemble work, but she has found ways of combining it with solos. Her "Shiva-Ashtakam" ("Ode to Shiva") is basically a solo; Satpathy alone comes forward to tell us how the moon gleams in Shiva's hair, how his fingers shimmer like fire, and so on. But in the background two other dancers, in complementary choreography, underline this glamorous portrait. Most of the dances, though, are for five, and to watch how Sen plays two off against three, and then a different two against a different three, and then maybe one against four, is like watching a school of fish, or a flight of birds, in their maneuvers. Together with these mathematics, we get an utterly visceral dance impulse. The knees bend, the feet smack the floor, the bodies give and give and don't stop giving.

One thing that united all these performances was live music. The Graham company had an orchestra of twenty-eight; the Morris troupe, six instrumentalists and eight singers; Nrityagram, three instrumentalists and a vocalist. I don't know how Nrityagram works out its finances, but the music bill for the Morris company's four performances was thirty-five thousand dollars; the musicians for the Graham troupe's two-week season cost a hundred and eighty-four thousand dollars. In these days of near-zero public funding for dance, one assumes that the companies more or less killed themselves to raise that money, and the result made all the difference in the world. Dance audiences, I believe, have now got used to taped music, and you *can* get used to it, the same way you can learn to eat Spam instead of ham, or breathe smog instead of air. Your life is just diminished, and you don't realize it until you see concerts such as we saw last month. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Small Island, *by Andrea Levy (Picador; $14).* In the shabby remnants of post-blitz London, three near-strangers find themselves in a single house. Queenie Bligh is a spirited Yorkshirewoman waiting for her husband to return from the war and taking in tenants to make ends meet. Gilbert Joseph, a Jamaican R.A.F. veteran, is struggling to establish himself in England, a country that he'd been taught was his motherland but which regards him as an interloper; his bride, Hortense, has just arrived in London and is bewildered that her education and class can't transcend the color of her skin. The narrative voice jumps between the characters, a technique that embeds familiar cultural observations in closely observed and surprising lives. If the plot sometimes verges on the operatic, Levy's writing deftly illuminates the complex and contradictory motives behind each character's behavior.

The Turkish Gambit, *by Boris Akunin, translated from the Russian by Andrew Bromfield (Random House; $22.95).* Erast Petrovich Fandorin is the young diplomat-detective featured in Akunin's mystery novels set in tsarist Russia. This novel, the third to be translated into English, centers on the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 and Fandorin's efforts to track down a Turkish spy within the Russian ranks. He's assisted by a young woman who has gone to the Bulgarian front in search of her fiancé. At the front, we encounter a duplicitous cast that includes ambitious army officers, European journalists, and even Alexander II. Akunin is wildly popular in his homeland, and deservedly so. His plots are intricate, with one story nesting inside the next, like matryoshka. And although some references may prove challenging to Americans, the wealth of period detail—about tactics in battles fought with cavalry and cannon, for example, and the gruesome outcomes—is impressive.



Soldiers and Slaves, *by Roger Cohen (Knopf; $25.95).* Less than a hundred days before Hitler killed himself, three hundred and fifty American P.O.W.s—most of whom the Germans had identified as, or suspected of being, Jews—were moved from Stalag IX-B to Berga, where, alongside Jews from Auschwitz, they were starved, beaten, and forced to work in appalling conditions before being sent on a death march. Cohen gives a powerful account of a chapter of the war that was long suppressed—in part, he argues, because American authorities didn't recognize that their own soldiers had been caught in a "little outpost of the Holocaust." Cohen is particularly good at conveying the otherworldly encounters between Americans and European Jews in the camp, as when shock spreads over the face of a G.I. who realizes, after an exchange in broken Yiddish, that the crowd of wraith-like figures he sees is made up of Jews like him.

Ghosting, *by Jennie Erdal (Doubleday; $24).* For nearly two decades, Erdal was the ghostwriter for a flamboyant London publisher, turning out letters, speeches, a newspaper column, and two well-received novels for her boss. The delight of this memoir is in Erdal's eye for the comic details of her partnership with a man who wears crocodile shoes with purple-and-yellow socks, times each of his daily activities to the nearest five minutes, and, when his publishing fortune is imperilled, orders thousands of phallic key-rings, believing that sales of such an item can save him. Erdal resorts to clichés when she muses on the nature of artistic creation, but she is discerning about her motives for ghosting—money, a compulsion to please, and a cloistered Scottish Presbyterian childhood that made the "irony and absurdity" of her job seem not just tolerable but glamorous.

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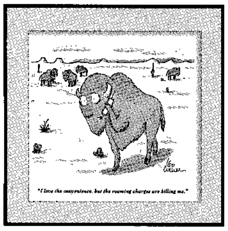

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BOOKS

BITTER BAMBOO

Two novels from China.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

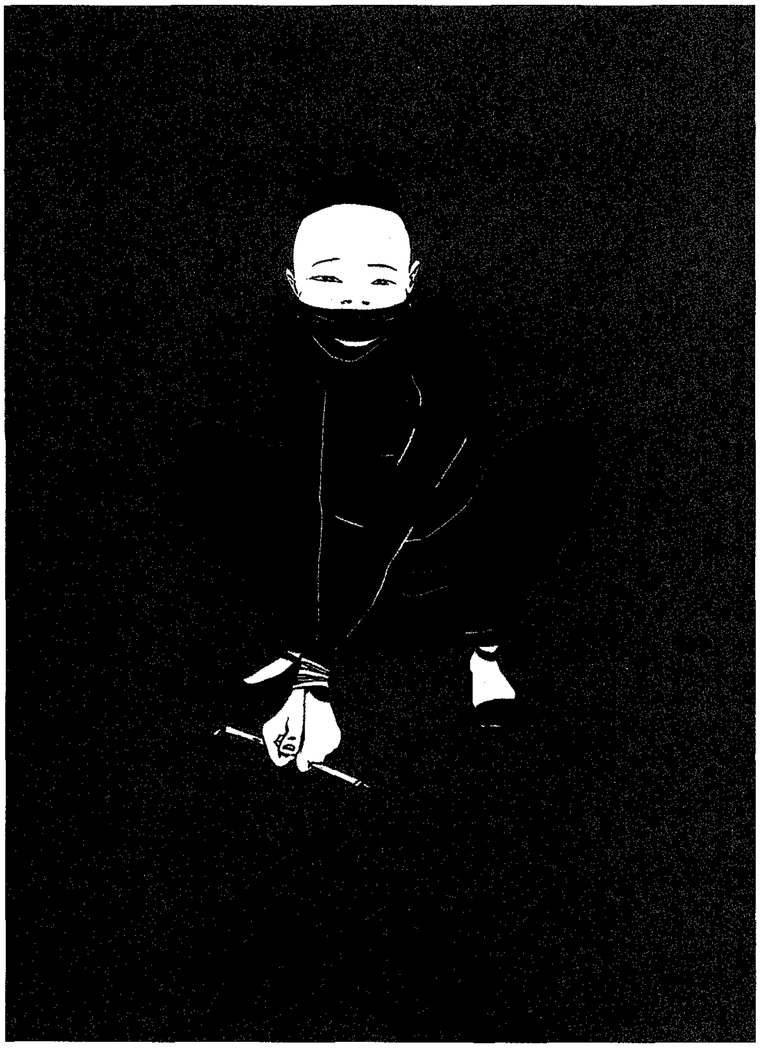
China, experts agree, is the nation of the future; its immense population, its acrobatic blend of totalitarian controls and booming free enterprise, and the commercial and intellectual success its emigrants have enjoyed in nations from Malaysia to the United States all augur impending global dominance. In literature, however, the Chinese mainland, as far as Western ears go, is pretty quiet. The one Chinese recipient of the Nobel Prize (if we don't count Pearl Buck) was an expatriate Parisian, Gao Xingian. Bookstores, the *Times* reports, are bustling, but nearly half the purchases consist of textbooks and half the translations are of American books. Meanwhile, American translation of contemporary Chinese fiction appears to be the lonely province of one man, Howard Goldblatt, the founding editor of *Modern Chinese Literature* and a professor currently at the University of Notre Dame. Goldblatt's midwifery has recently given us two novels by mainland authors: "My Life as Emperor," by Su Tong (Hyperion East; $24.95), and "Big Breasts & Wide Hips," by Mo Yan (Arcade; $27). Mo Yan's "Red Sorghum," which Goldblatt translated in 1993, won considerable notice and the hopeful remark from the Chinese-American author Amy Tan that "Mo Yan's voice will find its way into the heart of the American reader, just as Kundera and García Márquez have." Well, that's a tough old heart, and I'm not sure the Chinese are ready to crack it yet.

Su Tong was born in 1963, graduated from Beijing Normal University, and now lives in Nanjing. His novella "Raise the Red Lantern" was made into a film nominated for an Oscar. He is sufficiently at ease in his authorial persona to directly address the reader, explaining:

> *My Life as Emperor* could be considered a pleasure cruise through my inner world. It has long been my wish to penetrate the millennia of China's history, to transform myself into an old customer at some teahouse on an ancient street in the midst of a kaleidoscopic world with its teeming masses, and soak up the passage of time with my eyes. I am fascinated by classical times. . . . I hope my readers do not approach *My Life as Emperor* with the idea that it is historical fiction; that is why I have set the novel in no particular time. Identifying allusions and determining the accuracy of events places too great a burden on you and on me. The world of women and the palace intrigues that you will encounter in this novel are but a scary dream on a rainy night; the suffering and slaughter reflect my worries and fears for all the people in all worlds, and nothing more.

The shrugging, dandyish tone is continued by the novel's hero and narrator, Duanbai, the fifth son of the deceased Emperor, who is unexpectedly named as his successor: "Still a child at fourteen, I could not figure out why I had been chosen to continue the Imperial line." He had "despised" his father, and his succession is vigorously protested by the imperial concubine Madame Yang, who waves a testamentary edict naming her son, Duanwen, Duanbai's oldest brother, as emperor. She is bundled off, but declines to commit pro-forma suicide with the six other imperial concubines; retainers chase her down and throttle her with the traditional silk cord, but she hammers on her casket lid and sits up, still waving the edict. The casket is filled with dirt and nailed shut with "nineteen long nails." This is the first but not the last atrocious example of imperial administration.

Duanbai has been placed on the throne by his grandmother, Madame Huangfu, and his mother, the Empress Dowager, Madame Meng; they sit beside him during his audiences with his ministers and tell him what to say. His own interest focusses on his pet crickets in their cages. Gradually, he realizes that he possesses the power to "obliterate" anything that annoys him. Near where he sleeps there is a Cold Palace, "in the grove of parasol trees," where concubines discarded by the former Emperor weep at night. Annoyed by the sound, Duanbai secretly instructs the Imperial Executioner to cut off their tongues; when these are brought to him in a "bloody paper packet," he is struck by their resemblance to "salted pigs' tongues, which were quite a delicacy." The crazed servant who tends the palace alchemy cauldron repeatedly says that "the fire is out, and calamity will soon befall the Xie Empire," and the reader does not doubt it. When General Zheng, "on the western front," sends an urgent communiqué, the adolescent Emperor tells the messenger, "You give me a headache the way you're always bringing me this and that. You say the barbarians have broken through our defenses? Well, drive them back to where they came from. How hard can that be?"



As Duanbai ages, he ventures into the lists of both love and war, but with a ruinous ineffectuality. In love with the birdlike Lady Hui, he lets her be persecuted by his mother and grandmother, and by more pragmatic concubines; finally, Lady Hui is driven into prostitution, and when, his own fortunes having taken a downturn, he encounters her he quickly grows disgusted with the "degraded body" of this "once lovely girl who had run beside the Imperial Stream flapping her arms like a bird." On the battlefield, he stays in bed, "warmed by woolen quilts," as his chief of staff, Yang Song, urges him to show himself to his troops. When the demoralized troops lose, he orders that the badly wounded Yang Song be killed rather than rescued. The sight of the wounded man, "his face a bloody mess" while his hands are occupied in "trying to keep a length of purple intestine from spilling out," makes Duanbai vomit. The Emperor is also nauseated by another sight as he ventures out into the troubled Xie Empire—that of a nearly naked boy eating insects in a tree. A guard explains to him:

> He's hungry. There is no more food at home, so he survives on insects. That is what many village people feed on during normal times. When natural disasters occur, after they have fought over insects, the people are forced to eat the bark of trees. . . . And when their hunger becomes intolerable on their way to somewhere, they dig up the clay roadway and use that to fill their bellies. That always kills them.

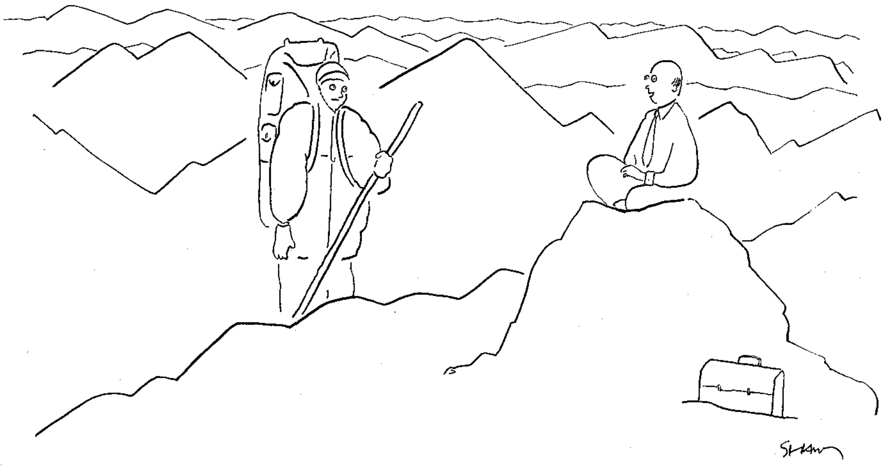
Theirs is a more merciful death, however, than that inflicted upon a defeated rebel leader, Li Yizhi, by eleven successive tortures ceremoniously called Backward Disrobing Primate, Immortal Rides the Mist, Hollow Out the Eggplant, and so on.

Su Tong's purpose in relating his combination "pleasure cruise" and "scary dream" must be, in part, an indictment of the imperial system, with its drastic inequities, its elaborate cruelties, its implacable protocols. But the emperor's narrative has the shallow perspective of a Chinese scroll; it is hard to enter into it. Though the book is not long, the fall of the Xie Empire feels long in coming. Only when it has fallen, and Duanbai is free to wander, in poverty and danger, in pursuit of his ambition to become a tightrope walker in a travelling circus, does the hero become a protagonist in the Western style, defined by aspirations, struggles, and discoveries. The novel turns companionably picaresque. Pushed off the throne after eight years there, Duanbai can suddenly see:

> Everywhere I looked, the land was rich and fertile, and everywhere we stopped, we were surrounded by thatched huts lived in by men who farmed and women who weaved. Villages that spoked out in all directions were like a vast tapestry in yellows and greens that spread out ahead on my road to safety. A river, or a muddy road, or a few odd trees separated me from the lives of the common people, yet they were never far away.

"My Life as Emperor" culminates in its biggest bloodbath yet, and the cry of the bullfinch, "Die—Die—Die," might be its epigraph. Like Voltaire's "Candide," this parade of misfortunes ends with a garden, "a weed-infested vegetable garden" in the deserted Bitter Bamboo Monastery on Bitter Bamboo Mountain, and with a doubt cast on palliative human wisdom, represented in this case by Confucius' "Analects." Su Tong's morbid fantasia wears an opaque lacquer of willful elegance. The reader suspects that exceptionally much is lost in translation. In sentences like "I knew then that I had truly fallen into the chrysalis of what transpires between a man and a woman" and "Her lips looked like a dead fish as they nibbled their way up my coiling dragon robe, producing a cheerless soughing sound," Professor Goldblatt is presumably pursuing the Mandarin text, ideogram by ideogram, but in one like "So it was a certainty that Duanwen was now licking his wounds in the residence of the Western Duke, having found safe haven at last," the English clichés seem just plain tired.

But Goldblatt's exertions here are as nothing compared with those in translating Mo Yan. This author, born in 1955 into a peasant family in northern China,



"No, but I can tell you the meaning of whole or term life insurance."

• •

sets a groaning table of brutal incident, magic realism, woman-worship, nature description, and far-flung metaphor. The Chinese novel, perhaps, had no Victorian heyday to teach it decorum; certainly both Su Tong and Mo Yan are cheerfully free with the physical details that accompany sex, birth, illness, and violent death. Right at the start of "Big Breasts & Wide Hips," we are witness to two difficult births, one by the very long-suffering heroine, Shangguan Lu, and the other by a donkey:

> The donkey struggled, yellow liquid shot out of its nostrils as its head jerked around and banged on the ground. Down at the other end, amniotic fluid and wet, sticky feces sprayed the area.

As for Mo Yan's metaphors, they are abundant and hyperactive:

> Sima Ting's persistent shouts floated in the air, like a fly in pursuit of rotting meat, sticking first to the wall, then buzzing over to the donkey's hide.

> My thoughts leaped across and squirmed beneath the white cloud that had so gently covered her and Babbitt. . . . My eyes were like blood-sucking leeches, fastened to her chest.

> Pastor Malory flung himself off the bell tower and plummeted like a gigantic bird with broken wings, splattering his brains like so much bird shit when he hit the street below.

> The morning winds blew in from the fields, like a wet cat with a glistening carp in its mouth, prowling arrogantly on the sheet-metal roof.

> A full-bodied girl to my right had a tender, yellow, budlike extra finger outside the thumb of each hand . . . and those darling little extra digits fluttered over her face like the curly tails of little piglets.

Such surplus energy of figuration attests to, if not greatness, a greatly ambitious reach. Mo Yan here seeks to accommodate in the story of one indestructible woman most of Chinese history from 1900, when Shangguan Lu, first called Lu Xuan'er, is six months old and is hidden in a flour vat while her parents are slain by German forces invading to suppress the Boxer Rebellion, to 1993, when she dies in the care of her only son, Shangguan Jintong, in church during a sermon preached, as it turns out, by the eldest son of her son's father, a Swedish missionary called Pastor Malory. The dauntless mother (the novel is dedicated to "the spirit of my mother," and Jintong is its narrator) survives these ninety-three years but is one of the few characters who do; her eight daughters, the various men who have fathered them, her sterile husband, her ferocious mother-in-law, her fellow-villagers in Northeast Gaomi Township—all, with a few exceptions, perish in the waves of war, famine, and Communist enforcement that bathe this hapless land in suffering. So many die that individual deaths register with little more emotion than a hit in a shooting gallery. One piece of pain that does linger in the mind comes when five-year-old Xuan'er's feet are bound by her aunt:

> First she bent the toes back with bamboo strips and wrapped them tightly, wrenching loud squeals of protest from her niece. Then she wrapped the feet tightly with the alum-treated white cloth, one layer after another. Once that was done, she pounded the toes with her wooden mallet. Mother said the pain was like banging her head against the wall.
>
> "Please, not so tight," Mother beseeched her aunt.
>
> "It's tight because I love you," her aunt said with a piercing glare.

As her uncle tells her, "Girls who don't bind their feet grow up to be big-footed spinsters that nobody wants." But history undercuts this marital strategy when the Manchu dynasty falls and foot-binding is banned. Xuan'er, sixteen and a beauty, is put on display; her "perfect lotus feet" are derided as "a poisonous legacy of a feudal system" while six young women with unbound feet sing and bounce around, "raising their feet high in the air to show their natural beauty," and an orthopedic surgeon demonstrates "how the broken bones of bound feet forever altered the shape of the foot." "A fallen phoenix," Xuan'er is humbly married off to the feckless son of a female blacksmith, and embarks on a strenuous life of domestic chores and wartime marches on crippled feet. At times, Mo Yan, speaking through Jintong, seems to forget that his heroine is handicapped, so dynamic does he make her, but at others he remembers: "The deep footprints she made in the muddy road with her crippled, once-bound feet were still discernible months later."

Seven of her daughters are physically sound (the eighth, Shangguan Jintong's twin, is born blind) but meet unkind fates in the century's clashing currents. Eldest Sister, Laidi, is forced to marry a crippled mute soldier in the Army of the People's Republic; Second Sister, Zhaodi, marries a local commander in the anti-Japanese forces who later becomes an anti-Communist rebel; Third Sister, Lingdi, daughter of a "peddler of ducklings," dies trying to fly; Fourth Sister, Xiangdi, becomes a prostitute in order to feed the others; Fifth Sister, Pandi, marries a commissar and, as Ma Ruilian, enjoys an active career in the Communist ranks; Sixth Sister, Niandi, marries an American pilot named Babbitt, who works with the eventually defeated Kuomintang forces; and Seventh Sister, Qiudi, offspring of a rape by four soldiers, volunteers, along the self-sacrificial lines of Fourth Sister, to be sold to a Russian woman.

While growing up, however, the girls did not lack for appreciation by their little brother, who from infancy basks in the "glorious tradition of Shangguan women, with big breasts and wide hips." We don't hear much about the hips, but it's a rare page that fails to mention breasts: they smell of sulfur and lamb; nipples are likened to dates, cherries, and button mushrooms, and drive the narrator to such extravagancies as "slightly upturned nipples as nimble as the mouth of a hedgehog" and "whenever her nipple was aroused, you could hang an oilcan from it." Jintong admires his mother's breasts from his little basket; they look to him "like a pair of happy white doves." He jealously wails at Malory's amorous attentions to them, until:

> She stuck the white doves up under my nose, and I urgently, cruelly grabbed one of their heads with my lips. Big as my mouth was, I wished it were bigger still. . . . I had one of them in my mouth and was grasping the other in my hands. It was a little red-eyed white rabbit, and when I pinched its ear, I felt its frantic heartbeat.

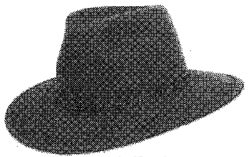
When his twin sister tries to nurse, he claws and kicks at her "until the poor blind thing cried her eyes out"; she survives on a thin gruel. Jintong refuses to be weaned at age seven, and a goat's teat is substituted, then goat's milk in a bottle:

> So I stuck the yolk-colored rubber nipple into my mouth. Naturally it couldn't compare with the real things on the tips of Mother's breasts—hers were love, hers were poetry, hers were the highest realm of heaven and the rich soil under golden waves of wheat.

So impressive and ardent are Jintong's evocations of nursing's primal pleasure that this reader was slow to realize that Mo Yan intended our hero to be not a healthily typical male but a case of arrested development. His mother strikes a rare note of maternal complaint when, being beaten by a Red Guard while an intimidated Jintong watches, she cries, "Stand up, my useless son!" Though he does in the end make the disgusting switch to solid food, he never quite makes the switch to real life, running afoul of Mao's revolution to the tune of fifteen years at a labor reform camp and emerging into post-Mao capitalism to waste several golden opportunities others have provided for him. His one consummated sexual relationship, arranged by his mother, is with Old Jin, the proprietress of a vast recycling station; she is much older than Jintong and has only one breast, but it is a big breast and has some milk in it. However, she wearies of babying him and decrees, "Shangguan Jintong, you're dog shit that won't stick to a wall, you're a dead cat that can't climb a tree. I want you to get your balls out of here!"

Professor Goldblatt, in his introduction, explains, "In a relentlessly unflattering portrait of his male protagonist, Mo Yan draws attention to what he sees as a regression of the human species and a dilution of the Chinese character." Amid so much slapstick mayhem and mammary lewdness, this moral risks being lost. What does bear in upon the exhausted reader is the crushing misery of Chinese existence in the last century, which, beginning in the final years of imperial rule, neatly dovetails with the imperial misery portrayed, in a stylized but not implausible manner, in "My Life as Emperor." Both worlds, ancient and twentieth-century, are stews of slaughter, torture, famine, flood, and, for the peasant masses, brutalizing overwork. Both protagonists are immature weaklings. Nevertheless, unlike many braver and more engaged characters in these fictional annals, they survive to tell their tales. Their wanton weakness and self-absorption, and the natural poetry both are capable of, rebuke the societies that have made life on earth hellish. Bad societies offer no incentive to grow up.

Mo Yan's portrait of Chinese history has met ire on the mainland. Goldblatt quotes one critic as calling the novel "a sycophantic, shameless work that turns history upside down, fabricates lies, and glorifies the Japanese fascists and the Landlord Restoration Corps." The Japanese forces, whose invasion is the principal event of "Red Sorghum," are relatively shadowy in this novel; but even a Western reader insensitive to the fine points of the civil conflict that placed Mao in power must notice that in this book Communist programs and propaganda are played mostly for laughs, and that the most praiseworthy men, the Sima brothers, are associated with the old, bourgeois regime and the Nationalist Army. Mo Yan's fate is to operate on the edge of official constraints; the novel, nearly a half-million words long as first published in 1996 in China, has undergone trimming and rearrangement right up to this translation, based upon "a further shortened, computer-generated manuscript supplied by the author." Semi-capitalist China will not replay the censorship game by the same rules as were hammered out in the Soviet Union, but free spirits in China are still short of enjoying free speech. ◆



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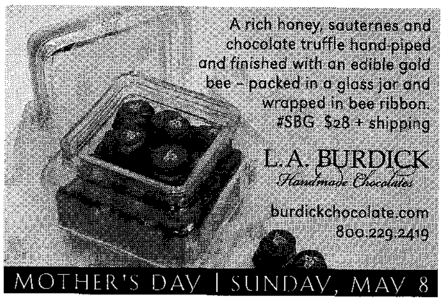

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THE ART WORLD

PARKED CARS

American Photo-Realism at its best.

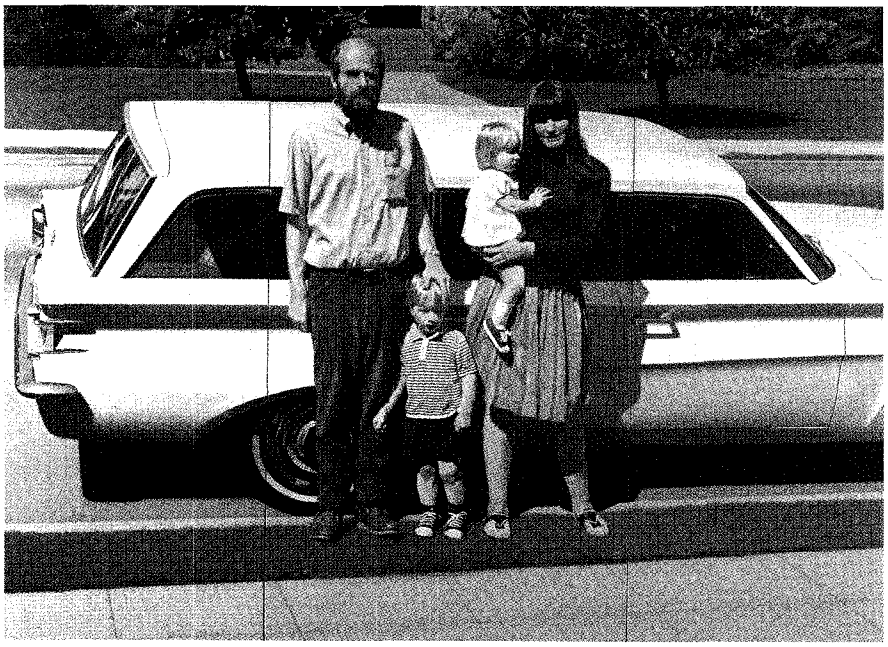
BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

I first encountered the underrated Bay Area artist Robert Bechtle's great painting " '61 Pontiac" (1968-69), which is in his present retrospective at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, in a 1969 group show in New York. It was among the early examples of Photo-Realism, a populist, generally lightweight movement that flourished beyond the pale of that time's strivingly serious art world, where recondite post-minimalism ruled. The painting was as good as American Photo-Realism would get: a vision of and about life in these United States as telling as little else since Edward Hopper, and a philosophically rich interplay of painting and photography that brings to mind Gerhard Richter. Seven feet wide, on three abutted panels, " '61 Pontiac" shows the artist and his family standing beside a creamy-white station wagon on a suburban street in the midday sunlight. The source is obviously a photograph—Bechtle had begun to work with slides projected onto canvas. Neatly bearded, subdued Dad, in a short-sleeved business shirt and baggy corduroy trousers, rests a hand on the head of his restive young son, in short pants and sneakers. Sturdy, long-haired Mom, her eyes in deep shadow, holds their uninterested little girl and smiles. She may be speaking. Details are slightly blurry, testifying to the snapshot's loss of definition when blown up to such a size. Of course, it isn't possible to describe a painting—a tissue of decisions—as "blurred." So the artist's faithfulness to the vagaries of photography is part of the picture's form and significance.

I remember being rattled by the middle-class ordinariness of the scene. For one thing, it was the last sort of image that one expected from the vicinity of San Francisco in that epoch of hippie revolutionizing. But the work did not feel conservative. Untouched by either sentiment or irony, it seemed, as it still does, entirely unconcerned with its own approximation of an American demographic ideal. Gradually, you register that it is beautiful. Translated into oil paint, the Kodachrome colors of flesh, grass, and Mom's striped skirt take on sumptuous, dreaming intensity. Though derived from the click of a camera, the image has none of what Roland Barthes termed a photograph's "punctum," its quotient of inaccessible pastness. In " '61 Pontiac," time balloons forward, backward, and sky-high. I sense the droning, sheer duration of days in suburban neighborhoods in mild climates, an immensity laced with a familiar terror: boredom, our foretaste of being dead. Nothing can happen there. Or something can—a family of four pauses beside a station wagon, whose predictability makes matters worse. In this and many subsequent works, Bechtle is a fascinated diver in the ocean of interminable American afternoons.

The Whitney Museum bought the painting in 1970, but Bechtle's career—managed in New York by the insouciantly commercial O.K. Harris gallery—attracted almost no further critical attention. The local avant-garde was in one of its "painting is dead" phases and was automatically dismissive of things Californian anyway. Meanwhile, the work's equable take on bourgeois America suggested a different country from the infernal regions ritually evoked by counterculturalists. Today, when most art of 1969 is snugly historical, " '61 Pontiac" stays fresh. That's because the spiritual realities that it channelled have not changed. The problem of how to live in this land, as it actually is, has outfaced all attempts to escape or transcend it. And the benumbing domination of our visual culture by cameras, of one kind or another, is as urgent a challenge to painting now as it was when Andy Warhol wedded mechanical imagery to high art four decades ago. Bechtle exploits the strangeness in humdrum photographs of the obvious, and he does so with the sort of reticent, stubborn grace that marks most of the Bay Area's finest painters—David Park, Richard Diebenkorn, Wayne Thiebaud.

Now seventy-two years old, Bechtle was born and grew up in the Bay Area, the son of a teacher mother and an electrician father who, during the Depression, resorted to selling door to door. ("Hoover Man" (1966) shows a rangy, cowboy-hatted dude with a vacuum cleaner, backlighted outside the partly opened front door of a house; his posture trumpets a wish to be anywhere else in the world.) Bechtle won early recognition as a budding artist. He was excited by art in Berlin, when he was stationed there as an Army private in the mid-fifties. He attended the California College of Arts and Crafts, in Oakland, where he purposely avoided studying with Diebenkorn, fearing infection by the master's then epidemic influence. A long tour of Europe in 1961-62—coincidentally, near the time of a similar and also decisive sojourn there by his Southern Californian contemporary Ed Ruscha—nurtured Bechtle's independence of mind. On the return trip, in 1962, he saw a groundbreaking show of Pop art at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York. He wanted something of that newness, he has said; but, typically for him, it could not resemble what others had done. Back home, paintings of gloomy interiors—expressing a melancholy streak that, suppressed thereafter, exerts a subliminal gravity in all his work—soon gave way to plein-air depictions of cars parked on nondescript streets. An exasperating struggle to manage the foreshortening of a black Cadillac in 1966 occasioned Bechtle's first use of slides, as an aid that became a content of his art.



The artist Robert Bechtle and his family in "'61 Pontiac" (1968-69).

Bechtle's paintings do not yield first impressions. I immediately feel that I know them thoroughly, as if from a prior life. This may be an effect of their congruence with the sorts of things that the brain, in self-defense, refuses to remember. Designed to seek import in what meets our eyes, we are equipped with ways of recognizing the unimportant in a flash, and blocking it from consciousness. Bechtle zeroes in on the always seen and never noticed—without giving it importance. (He differs in this from other Photo-Realists, who tend to congratulate a subject for having been chosen by them.) "Alameda Gran Torino" (1974), a masterpiece, is a nova of banality. The station wagon can't help but be only and exactly what Detroit fashioned. Hot sunlight can't help but glint from a bumper and produce a faint reflection of the windshield on a garage door. A closeness between the green of the car and that of a background shadow is unusual, but so perfectly meaningless that your mind may panic at the waste of its energy in beholding the fact. Then something peculiar can happen: your reflexive sense of the picture as a photograph breaks down, and the object's identity as a painting, done entirely on purpose, gains ground. Look closely. A congeries of tiny freehand strokes delivers an inconspicuous patch of foliage. The whole work is a feat of resourceful painterly artifice. At last, it's as if the original photograph were a ghost that died and came back as a body.

Bechtle's later work has grown in ease and virtuosity, with occasional loss of tension. Recent lovely charcoal drawings and aquatint etchings relax into exquisiteness. And he returns now and then to dim interiors, usually featuring himself gazing outward, which are more oppressive the better they are painted. (To Californians, might being indoors feel tragic in and of itself?) It can't be comfortable to accept that, by the nature of one's talent, somebody else's parked car amounts to a more compelling self-portrait than anything done with a mirror. That's Bechtle's lot. His street paintings vibrate with everything that his personality—like common photography, and perhaps like suburban society—bottles up. As in "'61 Pontiac," charged indirection skirts fatalistic comedy when family and friends appear. "Alameda Chrysler" (1981) portrays the artist's formidable, white-haired mother, snazzy in a bold flowered shirt and checked slacks, beaming beside her brawny coupe, against a near background of dark-green, sun-dappled shadows on trees, topiary, and a white house. It's a gorgeous day. Grandma's in clover. Life is incredibly complicated, and the proof is that when you confront any simple, stopped part of it you are stupefied. ♦

From an article about Randy Newman in the Rochester (N.Y.) Democrat & Chronicle.

If you wanted salacious details on Newman, you probably came into this already knowing that he tells women to leave their hats on when he's having sex. He'll do that in front of the entire Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra. Twice, in fact, once Friday and once Saturday on the stage of the Eastman Theatre.

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THE THEATRE

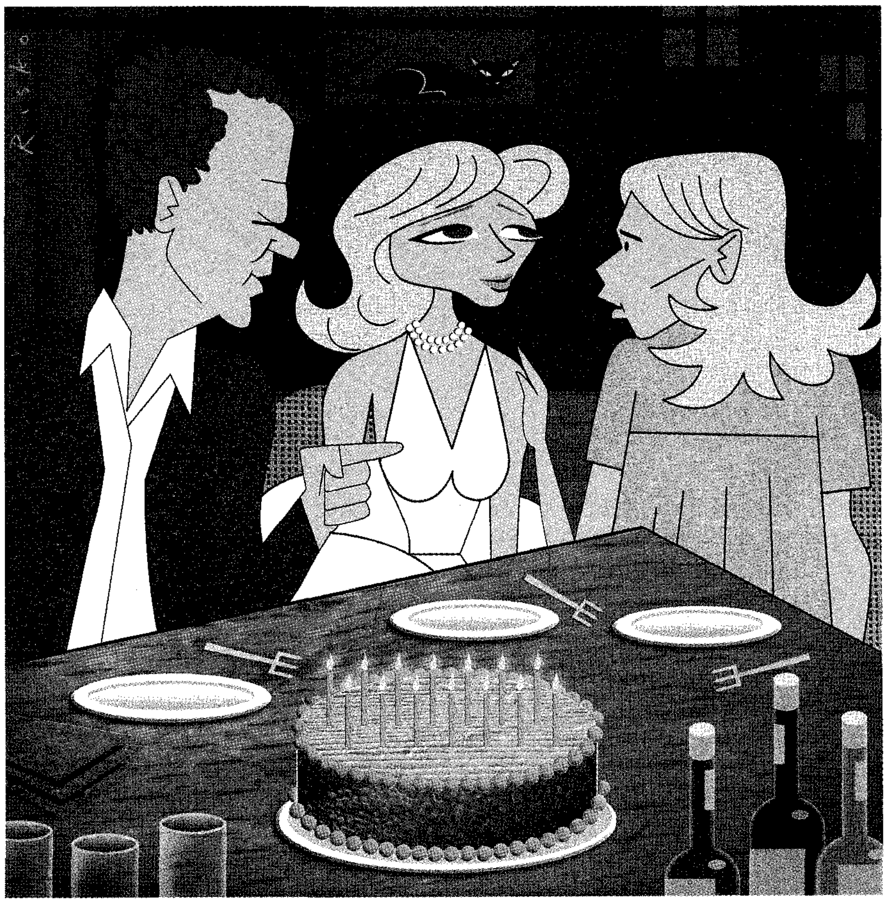
SURVIVORS

"A Streetcar Named Desire" and "Glengarry Glen Ross" return to Broadway.

BY JOHN LAHR

Tennessee Williams's masterpiece "A Streetcar Named Desire" (being revived in a Roundabout Theatre production at Studio 54) opened in 1947; the play, as Arthur Miller said, planted "the flag of beauty on the shores of commercial theatre." Among its many narrative sensations was the first sighting on the American stage of a sexual male—the priapic palooka Stanley Kowalski—and of sexuality as the engine of life. George Jean Nathan, one of the production's few dissenters, dubbed Williams a "genital man." "The play might well have been titled 'The Glans Menagerie,' " he wrote. As usual, Nathan was wrong. "The Glass Menagerie" (1945) looked backward to the thirties and to the sacrifice that came with that grim decade. "A Streetcar Named Desire" embodied the romantic notion of deliberate regression to the instinctual, and also registered the seismic spiritual shift after America's return to normalcy. The denizens of the louche, freewheeling corner of Williams's New Orleans are definitely our selfish contemporaries. "The lid was off," Philip Roth writes in "American Pastoral" about the period between 1945 and 1955, when per-capita income practically doubled. The boom gave a wallop to American individualism; "Streetcar" traps the era's ruthless and dynamic survival. Liberated from duty, from sacrifice, from hidebound class restrictions—all the emotional baggage that Blanche brings with her, represented by the loss of the family plantation, the well-named Belle Reve—each character pursues his own creaturely self-interest. When Stanley roars to his wife and to his intruding, neurasthenic sister-in-law, "I am the king around here," that kingdom of self is, in a way, what all three are trying to claim.

"The play cannot be disparaged," Miller also said. It can, however, be reconceived, which can be another way of putting it down. Here, in order to shed the iconic aura of Marlon Brando, the British director Edward Hall has cast Stanley against type, as a lumpen lout. "Be comfortable. That's my motto," the expert John C. Reilly as Stanley says to Blanche (Natasha Richardson) at their first meeting. The only problem is that Reilly, who has a pushed-in face and a strapping soft body, is not particularly comfortable in his own flesh. He exudes power but not the "pride of a richly feathered male bird among hens," as Williams described Stanley's "animal joy in his being." Reilly goes through the motions of sexual pleasuring, but he gives off hardly a whiff of sexuality. In changing the essential nature of the character, Hall inevitably lowers the stakes and throws the play weirdly off-kilter. For instance, Stanley's first entrance foreshadows his predatory appetite and his raffishness. He swings into view with a bowling mate and playfully tosses a package of meat up to Stella, in an exchange between them that conveys both thrill and class distinction. Stanley is all about flesh and feast, both of which require killing (even the stage direction points out that the package is "red stained"). The Roundabout production says the words but shrinks their poetic import. Stanley's assertive flamboyance is replaced by coyness—when is Stanley ever coy? He enters holding the meat behind his back like a valentine bouquet, then he flips it to Stella before toppling forward onto the bed with her birdlike body underneath him. At a directorial stroke, a vivacious stage picture is turned into a vulgar one, which Hall then trumps with another slapdash choice. Sitting outside on the steps of the Kowalskis' lair, a Negro Woman (Wanda L. Houston) says, "What was that package he th'ew at 'er?" "You hush now," her friend laughs. When Stanley's gesture was a public display, the line was meaningful; now, since she has to look through two rooms to see it, the words are virtually incredible.



John C. Reilly, Natasha Richardson, and Amy Ryan in a "Streetcar" without desire.

Many such details have not been

properly overseen by the director. When Blanche arrives at her sister's dilapidated apartment, she sizes up Stella: "You've put on some weight, yes, you're just as plump as a little partridge." The observation is important, because Stella, we soon learn, is pregnant; it also indicates that she's let herself go. Here, however, it's bewildering. Amy Ryan, who plays Stella, is as trim as a gymnast. The production misses, or doesn't care to see, the importance of signalling the creaturely in Stella's appearance; likewise, the direction fails to convey what Williams calls Stella's "narcotized tranquility," which is essential to the play's debate about self and crucial to Stella's final decision to sacrifice her sister to preserve her new family. Life must go on; the preserving lie—Stanley and Stella collude with each other about Blanche's rape—is demonstrated in the play's last image, a sort of Renaissance pictorial grouping, in which Stanley kneels at the feet of Stella holding her child on the stairway and sobbing as his fingers open her blouse. "Now, now love," he says. "Now love . . ." Unable to cope with the ambivalence of Williams's theatrical vision—the life and death forces at work in the play—Hall, though he keeps Stanley's line, cuts this crucial family image, including the baby. Here the tidy curtain comes down as Blanche is carted off to the madhouse. The audience gets the poignance of her exit but not the point of the play. Hall's choice, it seems to me, is not so much a vision as a vandalism.

At Blanche's core (and Williams's) is the hysteric's exhaustion at the masquerade of normality. In the course of the play, Blanche loses her mind; she has already lost her home, her husband, her good name, her job, and, she fears, her looks. "Something about her uncertain manner . . . suggests a moth," as the stage directions describe Blanche at her entrance; but a moth Richardson ain't. With her lustrous skin, her mane of long blond hair, and her buff, energetic body, there is nothing remotely exhausted about her. The fact that Richardson succeeds in making us believe in Blanche's fragility is a testament to her intelligence and to her technique. She is a sexual woman, and she is never better than when she calls the imperious Stanley at his own brazen game. "My, but you have an impressive judicial air," she says, spraying perfume from an atomizer in Stanley's direction and then flinching as he lunges at her. "If I didn't know that you was my wife's sister I'd get ideas about you," Stanley says. She does have ideas about Stanley; in her self-hatred Blanche has chosen him to kill her. "The first time I laid eyes on him I thought to myself, that man is my executioner! That man will destroy me," she tells Mitch (Chris Bauer). Although the play speaks this complexity, the production comes nowhere near finding in her behavior the immanence of Blanche's suicidal wish. Here what dies is the lyrical flow of the play.

Everything that's wrong with "Streetcar"—the casting, the rhythm, the attention to detail—is right in Joe Mantello's pitch-perfect revival of David Mamet's majestic "Glengarry Glen Ross" (at the Royale). If there's a better play about American business, I don't know it. In a sort of three-card monte of verbal manipulation, a group of Chicago real-estate brokers fight to get the leads, get ahead of each other, close the sale, and get on the board. The world is a dogfight. As in "Streetcar," it's survival at all costs, but with this difference—survival no longer holds the promise of blessing but only of barbarity. Language has lost its purchase on meaning; words are merely husks of feeling that decoy self-interest and connect the speakers to nothing but their own craven desire. Speech itself, powered by panic, becomes at once an identity and a destiny, a sort of awesome music that gets louder as the people who deploy it get emptier.

From the first beat of this production, the play swings; the virtuoso cast—Alan Alda, Liev Schreiber, Gordon Clapp, Jeffrey Tambor, Frederick Weller, Tom Wopat, Jordan Lage—sends it solid. Mamet's language plays like jazz: riffs of contrapuntal sound that create a force field of hilarity, sorrow, and fury. Take, for instance, Shelley (the Machine) Levene (Alan Alda, in an inspired performance), who, down on his luck, storms into the office having, he thinks, made a sale: "Get the *chalk*. Get the *chalk* . . . get the chalk! I closed 'em! I *closed* the cocksucker. Get the chalk and put me on the *board*. I'm going to Hawaii! Put me on the Cadillac board, Williamson! Pick up the fuckin' chalk. Eight units. Mountain View." Out of this competitive delirium, Mamet's hapless salesmen nonetheless become visionaries of a burned-out capitalist America. They dream of wanting, and everything they want is worthless. ♦

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

PERSONAL BATTLES

"Kingdom of Heaven" and "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy."

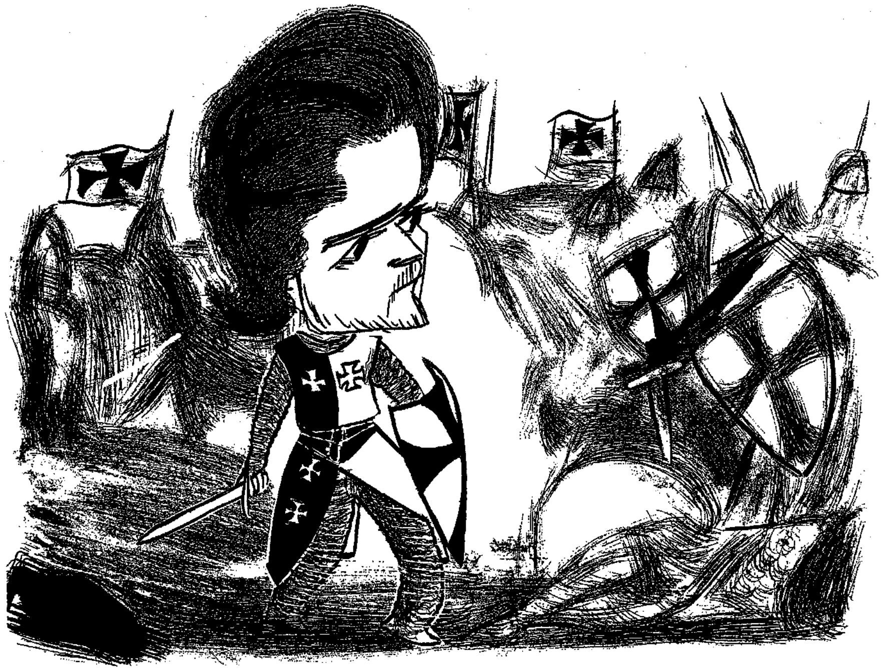
BY ANTHONY LANE

Here's a tough one. Why should "Gladiator" be such a storm of a movie and "Kingdom of Heaven" such a damp gust? After all, they share a fine director, Ridley Scott. Both are set in distant lands: the first in ancient Rome, the second in the heat of the Crusades. Both feature a hero who battles for his honor against resplendent villains. Both start with a dusting of snow. And both introduce, by way of inventive weaponry, great balls of fire.

One day, in the year 1186, Godfrey, Baron of Ibelin (Liam Neeson), stops by a French village to inform the local blacksmith that he is a complete bastard. To be precise, he is Godfrey's bastard, and now his rightful heir. This is news to the blacksmith, the humble Balian (Orlando Bloom), who nevertheless drops the horseshoe he's working on and accepts his father's offer of a trip to Jerusalem—all expenses paid, annihilation more or less guaranteed. Why does Balian do this? His religious faith is as watery as his bloodthirst, and he seems unswayed by riches and reputation. We do know that his wife committed suicide, and that he is seeking some form of atonement, or peace, but that is a dangerously spectral motive with which to fuel more than two and a half hours of epic. Contrast, again, the armored certainties of "Gladiator": Russell Crowe, too, was a widower, but his wife had been slain on the orders of the new emperor, and so his path to revenge lay clear before our eyes.

This void at the core of "Kingdom of Heaven" would not matter, perhaps, if our hero was large enough to fill it. Sadly, Balian is not that filler. He comes across more as a fellow to whom things happen than as somebody who can wrest events to his will. Shipwrecked on the shores of the Holy Land, he is bereaved of his father, recruited by Tiberias (Jeremy Irons), who is the military adviser to the King of Jerusalem, and seduced by the King's sister, Princess Sibylla (Eva Green), and her massed ranks of mascara. From here, Balian becomes fouled in a net of feuding, involving the King himself (a leper in a metal mask); the great Saladin (Ghassan Massoud), with whom there is a temporary truce; Guy de Lusignan (Marton Csokas), Sibylla's caddish husband; and the frankly animal Reynald de Châtillon (Brendan Gleeson). There really was such a beast, although whether his warlike locks were truly tipped with hot pink, so that he resembled an inflatable Christina Aguilera, only chroniclers of the time can confirm. And there really was a Balian of Ibelin, who did indeed wind up, as the movie demonstrates, commanding Jerusalem when it fell to Saladin in October, 1187.

Whether viewers will be content to see their hero agreeing to terms of surrender, rather than battling to the death, is open to debate; the fact that he does so for the safety of his citizens proves how politically nervous "Kingdom of Heaven" is. Scott plainly wants to provoke comparisons with the religious loggerheads of today, and to fire us with the swordplay of the faithful. At the same time, he and his screenwriter, William Monahan, take desperate care not to offend, alighting on a lull between the Second and Third Crusades when Christians and Muslims were in chivalrous equipoise, and loading the saner characters with just enough historical prescience to deconstruct their own folly. "I thought we were fighting for God. Then I realized we were fighting for wealth and land," a rueful Tiberias says. Even more self-chastening is the dying Godfrey, who advises his son to become "not what you were born but what you have it in yourself to be." Having barely studied the period, I hadn't realized that twelfth-century nobles favored the rhetoric of a miked-up Tony Robbins.



Orlando Bloom as a blacksmith who finds himself commanding the city of Jerusalem.

What cripples "Kingdom of Heaven" is its want of a beat—a basic pulse of expectation that would urge us to stand at Balian's side and to wonder, like him, what lies over the crest ahead. This being a Ridley Scott project, there are moments of deep bewitchment, as when Balian sits in the falling dark, on the hill of Calvary, and ponders his next move. So why not stay with it for a while, as David Lean did in "Lawrence of Arabia," when Peter O'Toole sifted sand through his fingers and thought through his plan for Aqaba? Scott's movie feels at once lengthy and rushed, and, to be blunt, Orlando Bloom is no Peter O'Toole. Bloom's Legolas, in "The Lord of the Rings," was cool and winning because of the grace with which he slid and breezed through every manner of peril, including a herd of berserk pachyderms. But Balian should signal goodbye to all that; the movie wants him bruised in body and agonized of spirit. Instead, what do we get? A light-footed lad, still part elf, who rouses the tremulous defenders of Jerusalem with all the assurance of a head prefect addressing a school assembly.

This is scarcely Bloom's fault; he just doesn't have the build, or the banter, of a leading hunk, and thus he joins the list of Hollywood stars, headed by Leonardo DiCaprio and Tobey Maguire, who remain, whatever the squeals of their fan club, a bunch of kids. As with Tom Cruise, the überkid, there's something ungrounded about them, a reluctance to verse themselves in the ways of the world. As the age of the target audience drops, so Hollywood has taken to plucking its principal actors from that same bracket, scared that older or wiser men would set too high an example—that their aura of experience might be construed as an insult. It's unfair to plant Orlando Bloom in the center of Jerusalem and to assume that his exertions will inspire the rest of the cast; in the event, listlessness is rife, with even the dependable Brendan Gleeson resorting to ham. One imagined that a movie about the Crusades would be gallant and mad; one feared that it might stoke some antiquated prejudice. But who could have dreamed that it would produce this rambling, hollow show about a boy?

It was inevitable that "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" would become a film, because it was running out of other things to be. It started in 1978 as a radio series on the BBC, "in a huge blaze of no publicity at all." Those were the words—typically modest and resigned, with a twist of exasperation—of its creator, Douglas Adams. Word of mouth was persistent, rumor swelled to a cult, and Adams recast the series as a novel (No. 1 in "The Trilogy of Four"), which was published the following year. A television version was broadcast in 1981, and the long grind toward a movie began. Adams died four years ago in Santa Barbara, of a heart attack, at the ridiculous age of forty-nine. Let us hope that the strain of adjusting to the world of movie adaptation—a world less breathable than any of the planets identified in his work, including Kakrafoon and Golgafrinchan—was not a contributory cause.

There will be two completely separate and, I might add, mutually hostile audiences for the resulting film. One will be composed of "Hitchhiker" fans, millions strong, who will interpret every minute discrepancy between what they are watching onscreen and what they once read on the page as a heresy punishable by law or, where possible, stoning. These people are lunatics, and I am one of them. Opposing us will be hordes of decent, ungeeky humans who will be bewildered and patchily amused by the tale of Arthur Dent and his voyage among the stars. Arthur (Martin Freeman) is an Englishman whose concern for his house, which is about to be demolished to make way for a bypass, is overtaken by his concern for the earth, which is about to be demolished by alien busybodies to make way for a hyperspatial express route.

From this initial conceit springs the rest of the "Hitchhiker" plot, in which Arthur and his friend Ford Prefect (Mos Def), who appears human but hails from somewhere near Betelgeuse, hitch a ride through the interstellar void. And from the opening, too, flows the wry, consoling tone that Adams made his own: the thought that, however many light-years you travel, and however repellent or majestic the creatures that cross your path, your reaction will be much the same blend of tetchiness, confusion, mild lust, and nervous laughter that prevailed in your everyday life. Adams, in short, domesticated space. I had heard that the movie was a wizened mockery of the original, so it was a pleasant shock to find just how many of the brightest jokes remain; one of the best, in which an entire intergalactic battle fleet is swallowed by a small dog, "due to a terrible miscalculation of scale," is declaimed during the final credits, as if nobody could bear to leave it out. The problem is not that the film debases the book but that movies themselves are too capacious a home for such comedy, with its tea-steeped English musings and its love of bitty, tangential gags. The demand for the literal, too, seems overwrought; a leading character with two heads became, in Adams's hands, a sustained joke about split personality, whereas here he's merely a job for special effects. As radio listeners, we couldn't believe our ears. These days, as hoary old moviegoers, we shrug, and believe our eyes. ♦

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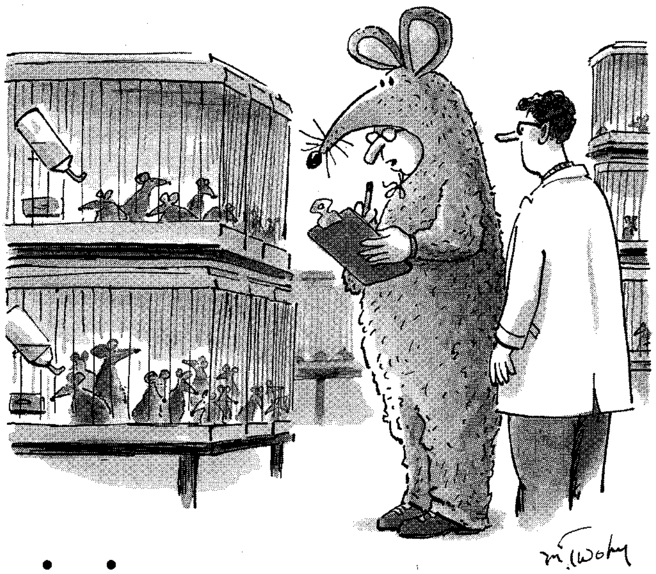
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

THE FINALISTS

“First, you must gain their trust.”
Russell Larson, Wallingford, Conn.

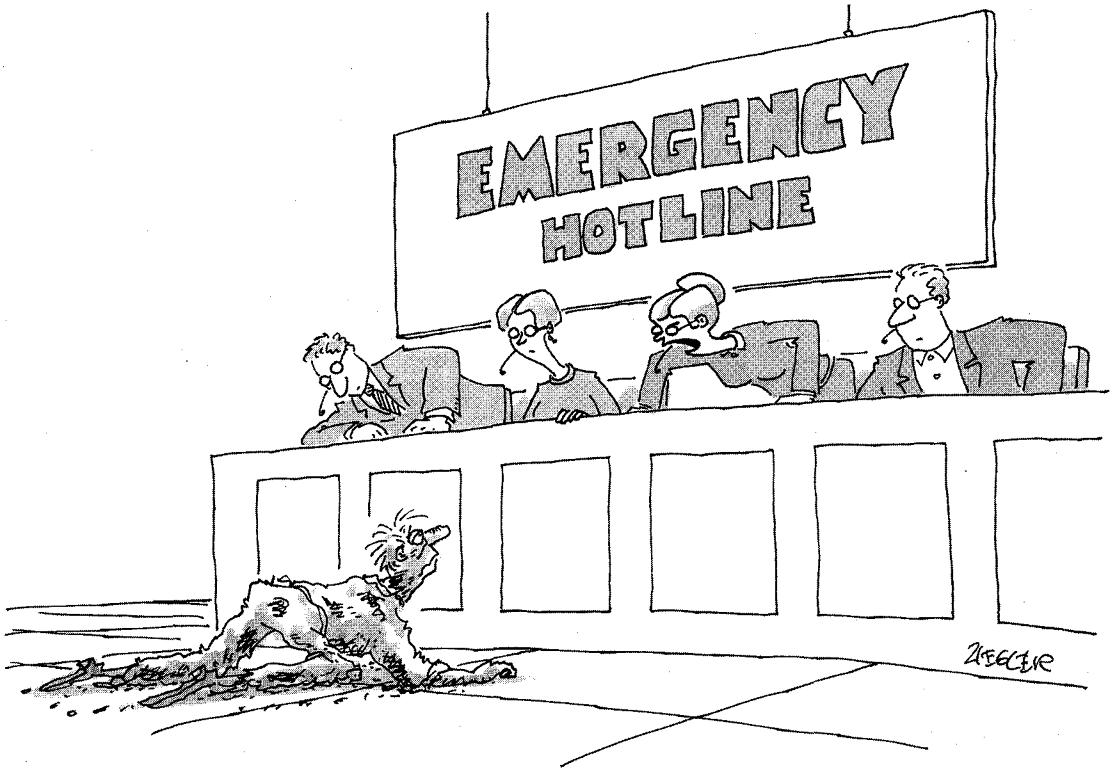
“More important, however, is what I learned about myself.”
Roy Futterman, New York City.

“Well, it was just easier than making a thousand tiny lab coats.”
Fred Baerkircher, Kent, Ohio.



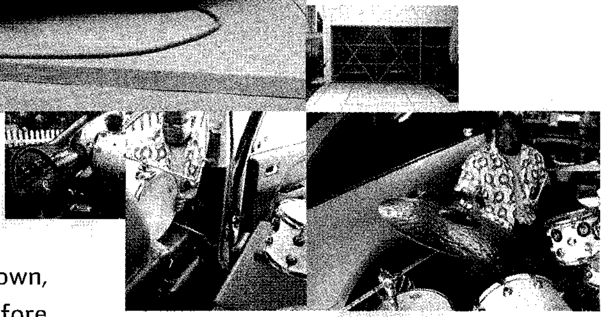
Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week’s cartoon, by Jack Ziegler, must be received by Sunday, May 8th. Finalists in the April 25th contest appear above; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists from this week’s contest, in the May 23rd issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THIS WEEK’S CONTEST



“ ”

THE SEVEN-PIECE DRUM kit fit effortlessly in the Montego. Eric's dream of converting the spare room into a drum room would not sit so easily with his wife.



Introducing Mercury Montego

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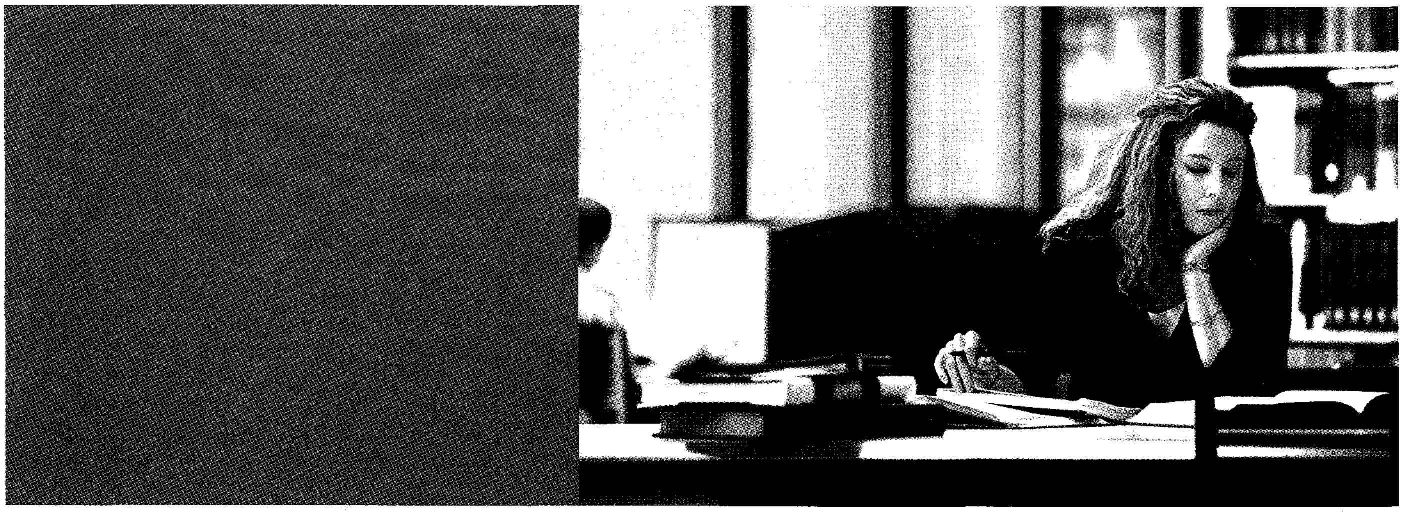

"Novartis drove my cancer into remission in 35 days. Now I'm going for my PhD."

Suzan was fighting a losing battle against a deadly form of cancer. She dropped out of school. She lost weight, her hair, and at times, her will to live. Then, a Novartis medicine put her cancer into remission in just 35 days. No one can promise what the future holds for any cancer patient, but today Suzan is back—into life and into a PhD in biology.

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